

THE LOVE OF THE FOOLISH ANGEL



HELEN BEAUCLERK

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THE LOVE OF THE FOOLISH ANGEL

by *Helen Beauclerk*

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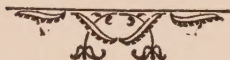
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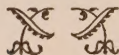
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BOOK I



CHAPTER I

*I*N those days devils were plentiful in Syria. It was said that the gods of the Emperor Diocletian, pagan Jupiter and his companions, were become devils, and could be seen in their true guise by any man bold enough to visit their temples at night—all black and scaly, sitting at the feet of Satan. Other devils were in the streams and forests, others in the flowers; and there were tales even of a devil who sat upon the fruit in the orchards, so that a certain young woman having been tempted to eat a particularly fine red peach, had eaten the devil also and would have lost her soul but for the prayers of Cyriacus, a holy man of that place. It was plain, in fact, that the accursed angels whom Lucifer had led into rebellion and whom Michael had cast out of Heaven into Hell, were come upon the earth in considerable numbers, and having, since their downfall, greatly increased in cunning and in power, were assuming every imaginable shape in order to seduce and to torment Christian people. By their sin they had forfeited the hope of salvation, and now their only wish was to ruin mankind likewise. And so they came, quick with lust and hatred, rejoicing in their wickedness.

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Yet there was one among the followers of Satan who did not delight in evil. His name was Tamael, and he was different from all his fellows, for though he had been involved in their disgrace and with them had been cast down from Heaven, he had not sinned as they had sinned, nor rebelled, as they had done, against the Celestial Law. In Paradise before the Fall, he had lived a blameless life, singing in the Choir of the Ninth Order and playing with his round-cheeked companions upon the golden terraces, and knowing nothing of ambition or of discontent. Indeed he had loved everything about him—the gardens and the courtyards wherein the doves and peacocks strutted and from whence the jasper walls rose up, tower above tower to the Citadel of the Lord; the limitless blue sky that encircled Heaven like a vast airy sea; the groves of lilies and of roses; all the sweetness and the scents of Paradise. Tamael was young and maybe he did not fully understand his happiness; yet he was altogether happy, and often, after he left his home, he pictured its beauties to himself and wept to see what he had lost because of love and his own foolishness.

For Tamael, who had loved everything in Heaven, had also loved Lucifer, the proudest and the most beautiful of the archangels, and it was this sentiment that had been his undoing. He was not

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aware that his devotion could be sinful, for Lucifer was very generally admired and esteemed at that time. No one suspected the archangel's designs save his intimate associates, the band of evil angels who plotted secretly with him to attack and seize the throne of Heaven; and Tamael was not a member of that infamous company. Being of a humble and somewhat timid nature, he had never dared approach his hero closely. He had watched him always from a little distance, peeping out at him from behind columns or from between the branches of trees, and if he did sometimes follow him to the hall wherein the archangel assembled his disciples, Tamael even then would stand upon the threshold, and without hearing the words that Lucifer spoke, was well content to gaze, entranced and wondering, at the speaker's face. On the day when Lucifer called the rebels to his house for a decisive conference, Tamael got no nearer than the doorstep, where he sat throughout that fatal hour, entirely satisfied with the thought that presently he would see the archangel go by, would mark the trace of lovely, arrogant feet, would actually feel upon his cheek, perhaps, the wind of a beloved mantle.

He had no suspicion of what was happening within. He did not hear those awful promises of a richer, happier city that the rebels were to build upon the ruins of Heaven; he did not see the

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image of a new and beautiful creature, round of breast and limb, long-haired and soft-lipped, that Lucifer wrought out of air and vowed to give to the assembled angels if they would consent finally to rebellion. He did not see the golden peacocks' feathers that the archangel drew from under his cloak and distributed among his followers as signs and symbols of revolt. And so it was that when Lucifer came out of his door, and seeing a little angel crouching in the shadow, offered him a golden feather also, Tamael accepted the gift gladly. He was so overwhelmed with gratitude that he did not stop to ask why Lucifer had suddenly become gracious. No doubt the archangel had observed him on many earlier occasions, had noticed his patience and his adoration, but this was the first time that Lucifer had looked directly into his servant's face, the first time he had paused and spoken to Tamael. "It seems you love me, little one," Satan said, and Tamael could only gape and blush and stammer foolishly, "O my Lord! My Lord!—"

He had no notion of the feather's terrible significance. He did not know that Satan had entrapped him unawares and that on the morrow every wearer of the golden emblem would be reckoned an enemy of Heaven and flung, helter-skelter, into the infernal pit. He did not know that ignorance and foolishness can be accounted sin. "Wear this for my sake,"

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Satan had said, and Tamael had taken the feather and placed it in his bosom, and on the very morning of the Great Fight had worn it proudly for all to see, never suspecting that it could do him injury. The trumpets of battle sounded, and Tamael, unconscious still of what their noise portended, had run out of the gardens where he and his companions were at play, and coming to the terraces, had fallen instantly into the hands of the archangel Michael. The Heavenly Captain did not wait to argue or explain; he had already emptied Paradise of a host of rebels and was on his way to punish many more. The golden feather that was Satan's emblem of revolt shone brightly on Tamael's breast, and seeing it, Michael caught the little angel up and hurled him without more ado over the edge of Heaven into Space.

Tamael was very unhappy in Hell. For long ages after his fall he had lain stunned and without sense, and though this dullness had spared him a measure of his fellow devils' earliest discomforts, when he awoke his wretchedness infinitely surpassed theirs. For whereas Satan and his rebels were sustained, even in Hell, by hatred and the desire for revenge, Tamael had no such consolations; and where they enjoyed in some degree a blackness that matched their own evil, Tamael's every instinct was offended. At first he could not make out how he came to be

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in this stinking, dark, abominable place, and remembering nothing but gardens filled with sweet fruit and flowers, streets that were paved in gold and crystal, sapphire mansions that shone joyously in the eternal sunlight, he flew hither and thither, seeking a way back to those enchantments. But all he found was rock and charred earth, and lakes of brimstone and mighty furnaces, and at last Satan, whose story of the Great Revolt and of the trick by which he had involved the little angel in his own disaster, gave the final stroke to Tamael's despair. "I did not sin! I did not sin!" he cried, and again as Satan reminded him that he had worn the peacock's feather, "I did not know," he said, and hung his head that he might not see the face that he had loved and whose beauty had so deceived him. Yet after this he ceased to protest against the vileness of his surroundings. "If Michael thought me guilty," he said, "guilty I am, and must suffer for my guilt." He was of a gentle, meek and guileless disposition.

But he never grew altogether accustomed to the ways of Hell. He dreaded to walk upon the sulphurous earth in which the workers were forever digging burning pits, and could not recover from the nervousness he felt whenever the ground opened before his feet and flames issued suddenly forth. He did not suffer from the heat yet he disliked the furnaces, and more than anything he hated to see the

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victims burn. Indeed the pain of these unhappy wretches hurt him so much, that on one occasion, hoping to relieve their thirst with liquid that to him was pleasant enough drinking, he fetched a number of them cups of molten brimstone from the lake and was aghast to find that it brought them no ease.

Another thing that disturbed him greatly was the presence of the female devils. "What are these creatures," he asked of one of his companions, "that are so lumpy and misshapen, that walk so oddly and speak with such shrill voices?" "They are women!" the devil answered. "Do you not recall the lovely image Lucifer made in Paradise and promised to give to us if we would fight with him against the Lord Jehovah?" But Tamael remembered nothing of the kind, and the devil proceeded to explain how in Heaven the angels were neither male nor female, or rather they were both, and how wearisome their lives had been because of this sameness, and how Lucifer's idea of dividing each spirit into two had given birth to conflict and desire and hatred and reconciliation and "all manner of delightful things," the devil said. "Women," he further declared, "are the pleasantest things in Hell, and even on the earth, for after Lucifer had made the image that he called Lilith, the Lord Jehovah created Eve, and what we should have done without her when it came to tempting mankind, I do

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not know." And he related many curious matters concerning women that shocked Tamael deeply. The little devil had not seen the wraith of Lilith and in any case was not attracted to her Hellish offspring. "Lucifer," he reflected, "may have conceived a lovely dream while he himself was beautiful and in Paradise, but in Hell it has become ugly."

During this time Tamael had but one cause for satisfaction, which was that despite his natural inclination to submit in everything, he never performed any truly devilish duties. He would go to where the other devils labored and make a show of being busy, of running errands for them or of carrying their tools, but when he did these things the messages were always wrongly conveyed, the pincers and pokers lost. In fact he did no work at all. He could not bring himself to help in the building of infernal homes nor to dig in the fiery quarries nor yet to use the spits and pitchforks of the cooks, and even his hours of seeming activity were spent listening to the tales that his companions told of life upon the earth. In this way he learnt many interesting matters: how men and women sinned continually, and how the devils tempted them to further wickedness, and how there were saints who sought to bring these sinners to salvation, and sorcerers who strove only that they should be damned. And though Tamael

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soon came to the conclusion that the earth was a sad and an evil place, he liked to hear these tales. At the least, they gave him a diversion from the terrible monotony of Hell.

He would not work, he could not play, for he disliked the thought of dancing and of matrimony, which were the devils' chief forms of recreation, and his own taste for music he did not care to indulge. He had kept, no one knew why, a gentle tenor voice that sounded foolishly in the infernal chorus, and after one attempt he gave up hope of ever practicing his art again. Hell's hymns were sung at dawn and evening in the greatest of its mansions. The devils were all gathered there, and commonly their raucous tones rose in a prolonged shouting and crying. But on the day Tamael sang, the hall echoed only to one strain of music and then to peal after peal of laughter, while Tamael, the unwitting cause of this excessive merriment, fled from the presence of his fellows.

At every turn he was dismayed, shocked, mortified, and all these miseries increased as time went by, and every hour Tamael became more weary. Always his heart ached with a strange anguish that was partly remorse and partly perplexity and partly a longing he could not describe; and always when he slept it seemed he was returned to Heaven, and always when he woke he was astonished and con-

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fused to find himself in Hell. And at last his wretchedness and his distaste were brought to such a pitch that he gave up his pretense of sharing in the life about him, and going to a certain hollow rock he had discovered, spent his days within the rock, wailing and bemoaning his fate. And here, upon a day when he was weeping more loudly than was his custom, it chanced that Satan passed by and found him and asked him what he did, skulking, and crying when he should be at work. And Tamael, having crawled out of his hiding-place, flung himself at Satan's feet, and between terror and desperation, told him all his miseries. For he was come now to a state where even his fear of Satan's majesty was a less bitter thing than his own loneliness.

And at first, much to his astonishment, Satan was kind, and lifted Tamael up and listened patiently enough to the story of his woes. "But what would you have me do?" he said when Tamael had ceased speaking. "You were made a devil by the will of the Lord Jehovah and the carelessness of Michael, His Archangel. It seems, therefore, that you must remain a devil to the end. I cannot help you, for I, also, am subject to the Lord of Hosts and have no power to reverse His Judgments." Hearing these words, Tamael could only twist his hands and shift from foot to foot and gaze imploringly up into his master's face or unhappily down at his own black-

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ened legs. Tamael was not ugly. He had no horns upon his head nor webs between his toes; wings did not sprout upon his rump nor monkeys' heads upon his breasts. He had the likeness of a youth, tall and slender, with wings that grew in orthodox fashion on his shoulders and a mild expression upon his face. But he was black and altogether naked, and this and his deep sense of guilt were the reasons of his embarrassment.

"Is there nothing I can do," he asked, "that will take me from this place? If you could see into my heart, dear Master, I think that you would pity me."

But Satan shook his head. "I have told you," he said, "that it is not in my power to relieve you. You know that if you will not stay in Hell and punish sinners you can go on earth and tempt them. There is no other fate for you. And I think," he said, "that you would do well to remain here, for there are things on earth that will trouble your simplicity—traps of every kind—wily men and wiler women—priests and bishops who will cheat and bully you maybe—sorcerers and magicians who will make you work whether you desire to or not."

"O Master! Master!" wept Tamael, "I cannot stay here! And indeed I have not the wit to tempt the stupidest of the Lord's creatures! Is there truly no other way?" He would have said more, but at this moment Satan, of a sudden, lost patience. "That is

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enough," he cried. "You are a fool and whatever you do will be a disgrace to me and to the Lord Who made you! Since you hate Hell, be off with you and see if you like the Earth better!" And he lifted his mighty foot and gave Tamael a kick that sent him flying high into the air, over the lakes of brimstone, over the rocks and palaces, and out at last of the great gates of Hell.

And so it happened that Tamael came to Syria.



CHAPTER II

HE alighted in the valley of Antioch on the first day of Spring. A few hours before, and the banks of the river Orontes had been bare of flowers; there was no grass upon the meadows or upon the hills beyond the meadows, and the trees that grew beside the water and on the shadier slopes were black and shining in their lusty nakedness. But now—such are the sudden ways of Spring in those parts—the anemones were all abloom together, and the whole countryside was turned from a uniform brown hue to brightest red and white and yellow and purple. The flowers were still so young that their heads alone appeared above the ground, and the maidens who ran out of the house to greet them could find no stalks whereby to pull a nosegay or to weave a garland; yet they were so thick that the girls stepped not on grass but on a living tapestry of petals.

The sun shone. The very clouds upon the peaks of Amanus rested as tenderly as the new blossoms on the almond and cherry trees. In the woods were violets and hyacinths, and everywhere there was a

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scent, sweet yet sharp, like that of crab-apples. And Tamael, discovering these things for the first time, wept because they were so beautiful. He stood upon the rising ground beside a certain village and looked to the right and to the left of him and above and below. He did not know of Winter, far less of the miracle the sun had wrought, yet he was greatly moved to see the brightened valley and the river and in the distance Golden Antioch herself, gleaming golden indeed in the clear sunlight. He saw the colors, he breathed the smell of earth and dampened tree-trunks, he heard the singing of the birds and the noise of the girls' laughter, and laying himself down among the flowers, he pressed his face to the ground and wept because all these things reminded him of Paradise and were so beautiful.

In a little while, the first sharpness of his ecstasy being past, he rose and walked on towards the village. His pace was leisurely and he continued to turn his head this way and that, for he was full of amazement and delight, and everything he saw, the birds, the buds upon the trees, the creatures in the fields, the very houses, excited him to further wonder. As he reached the village street, the gossips came out to sun themselves upon their doorsteps, and at once Tamael drew near; he knew he was invisible and therefore free to indulge his humor as he chose, and he was very curious to see these folk,

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and to hear what they might say this fine Spring morning, and to discover if their thoughts would turn—as they should turn—on Heaven and the best and quickest way of attaining to eternal happiness. Tamael's notions of life upon the earth were a trifle dim, yet he was aware that men were set midway between Heaven and Hell in order that they should testify to the excellence above and to the vileness below, and he was aware also that they had but a short time to judge of either.

The gossips were chattering very earnestly, nodding and wagging their heads and blinking their eyes as though the matter they discussed could scarcely bear contemplation. A human name, often repeated, was all that Tamael could at first distinguish, but soon their voices were raised, and he understood that they were indeed speaking, if somewhat indirectly, of Heaven and of virtue.

Said one of them: "Basilea is beautiful if you will, but her beauty is not of a kind to bring a Christian girl to Paradise. Have you seen the shadows round her eyes? If she were my daughter and she looked like that, I would beat her till she cried her eyelids red as bacon." And another: "No, I fear that she will not be the one in our village to earn a virgin's crown. She will not be a martyr like Agatha and Cecilia and blessed Euphemia." And a third, leaning close to the ear of her neighbor and whispering so fiercely

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that the air held for quite a moment the garlic odor of her eagerness: "My dear," said she, "I heard the holy man advise her father that she should marry early. What has she been confessing?" Whereupon some laughed a thin, squealing laugh, while the others began to whisper all together, and Tamael hurried on, mightily astonished.

What, he wondered, could this awful beauty be that made the girl Basilea unfit for Paradise? He pictured it as something strange and terrible, something akin perhaps to the look Satan could assume when he grew stern, and his red, fiery eyes compelled all those who saw them to stare and stare and yet to cower before their ghastly fascination. Tamael had been told in Hell of female charms and of the delicacy they imparted to their owner's virtue, and how they were a trap to men and a peril even to the angels. But he had not expected to encounter any of a truly monstrous nature; and his first careless pleasure being now considerably diminished, he went more prudently and peeped into the doorways of the mud-covered houses and over the tops of walls, in terror lest the girl Basilea should be in hiding and should spring out upon him unawares. He watched the children that rolled and tumbled in the dust, and the men and women (decently attired, as he was glad to see, in blue and white and yellow robes), who loitered in the narrow street or

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worked in the fields and vineyards; and he listened attentively to every sound, "for," thought he, "it is well to learn all that can be learnt of dangerous things."

And presently, as he was peering in this way through the open front of a tavern, he heard again the name Basilea. The tavern was very small and so full of smoke and noise that Tamael had to thrust his face between the earthen pots that stood upon its counter and the bleeding sheep's heads that hung above the pots, in order to see or hear anything that passed within it. And what he thus discovered he did not like, either for looks or for smell. In one corner a child was cleaning vegetables and throwing the peel upon the floor, and in another, beside a table on which were cups and wine-skins, a woman was frying meat and garlic in a pipkin. Her dress, the food she cooked, the litter on the floor, every object in the tavern indeed, gave off a stalish odor, so that the herdsmen who sat drinking there with their feet in a mess of rotting husks and bits of offal, had their heads in a stench of hot fat, spilt wine, rank vegetables, and the thin sourness of dirty rags. "Here's to Basilea!" cried one of them. "May her breasts never become like Meroe's!" And he laughed and gave the woman by the wine-skins a pinch. But she neither moved nor answered, heeding him no more than if she herself had been a

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leather bottle, and it was Tamael who blushed and shuddered and drew back.

"Basilea is not for such as you," said another drinker. "She is too fine for countryfolk. She will marry some pretty man from Antioch who wears a wreath and gilds his toe-nails and walks like this." With two fingers of each hand he wrapped his tunic tight about him, and leaning forward, waddled stiffly across the room. His friends were much amused and slapped their thighs and spat with pleasure. "Then we can make him bastards!" they shouted. "Here's to Basilea, the Christian Aphrodite!" And they drank the acrid, rosin-scented wine, and laughed and spat again, making, moreover, such unseemly gestures with their hands that Tamael was shocked beyond endurance and left them hurriedly as he had left the gossips. In any case, he told himself, he wished to learn no more of one who had been likened to the demon Aphrodite.

But wherever he went it seemed that he could not escape her influence. He had heard her name spoken in the street and in the tavern, by Christian neighbors and by pagan herdsmen, and when, having run quickly from the sound of it, he stopped beneath a flowering pear-tree to rest after his haste and to cleanse his eyes and nostrils with the sight of bees and the fragrance of blossoms, he heard it in that place also. He had turned from the main road into a disused orchard where the fruit-trees grew

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wild, and under one of these he saw two youths half-sitting, half-lying in the grass. They were fair-looking lads, the one with a dusky bloom of hair upon his face, the other younger, his cheeks still innocent of down, his eyes bright and quick-moving as a child's. Both were sad, but Tamael thought the elder the more gravely so; his glance was fixed and brooding, whereas the younger's strayed constantly over the orchard, sprang with the crickets from stalk to stalk or darted with the lizards in and out among the sun-scorched stones. Yet it was plain that he also felt concern, if only for his friend's trouble, for whenever the elder youth sighed and whispered to himself—which he did often—at once the other's glance returned from wandering and rested inquiringly upon the sigher, as though to ask what compassion should be doing in such an odd yet pitiable pass. The bees hovered and murmured, settled and were silent. A breeze, freshened by the distant sea, stirred the branches of the fruit-trees and shook from them their perfume and their blossoms. "Basilea! Alas! Alas!" sighed he whom Tamael took to be the older of the pair. His companion said nothing, but after a pause—maybe of doubt as to the aptness of his sympathy—he drew a flute from his bosom and began to play thereon an air so full of longing and of melancholy that it also seemed to cry:

"Basilea! Alas! Alas——"

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"This is indeed a dangerous creature," thought Tamael. "She casts as many different spells as Satan himself." He was distressed, for he had found the youths likable and the younger's devotion to his stricken friend had reminded him of his own lost Heavenly companions; and as he again proceeded on his way he grew despondent and ceased to look about him, and was even for flying off to Antioch city in order to forget, in exercise and change of scene, his sudden unhappiness. He would undoubtedly have acted on this impulse if, at that moment, his attention had not been drawn, as it were despite himself, to a fine, white house—the last in the village and by far the cleanest and the handsomest—and more particularly to an old man who stood waiting on its doorstep, dressed in black and wearing a long gray beard. From his habit, from the grave yet kindly expression of his face, from his bare feet and the evidence they gave of prolonged and painful walking, from the sign he carried on his bosom, Tamael knew the old man to be a priest of God. "O excellent robes!" said Tamael. "O holy feet! O blessed beard!" He was much comforted, and although he dared not approach too closely, lest the saint's keen spirit should detect his presence and be offended, he turned once more from the high-road and gazed earnestly at the fine white house and at its reverend visitor. Presently the door was

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opened and the old man went in, and Tamael, unable to resist the temptation, sprang into the garden of the house. He had not the courage to follow the saint directly, to walk with him through the rooms or look with him upon their inmates, yet he was determined to discover, if only from a distance, what manner of lovely dwelling, what manner of happy folk, were thus made holy.

He had not gone far when his most fervent expectations were fulfilled. The garden was very large and at the point where Tamael had entered it was thickly wooded, so that he might have fancied he had straightway come, by the mere act of leaping over its enclosing wall, into some remote forest glade. Trees and thickets, already green with buds, surrounded him, and further on he found a stream and then a pool half-screened by willows. And there, seated on the mossy ground and dabbling its hands in the water, was a creature that Tamael took at once to be an angel. He had anticipated loveliness and piety. Here was beauty such as he had not seen since Lucifer first roused him to adoration, and sweetness such as Heaven had never, in Tamael's memory, surpassed. He was the more certain the creature was divine that it wore its curls loose upon its shoulders as the angels do, and a white robe girt up about the hips and bound beneath the breast with ribbons. Its eyes were dark, the lids so painted

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by Nature that their softness outrivalled, as Tamael was to learn later, the most excellent works of Art. Its nose was straight, its lips full but not too pouting. If it showed more of graceful knees than is usual in Paradise, Tamael did not heed the impropriety.

For he was too entranced for criticism. He had stopped a few paces from the pool's side and stood with one hand against a tree, his heart beating, his wings aquiver. But although he kept his eyes intently fixed on the angelic being and watched how the sunlight played pretty tricks upon it, burnishing its dark hair and bespattering its neck with gold, and leaping up from the water so that wreaths and aureoles of reflected light swam upon its face, he did not in reality notice anything at all. After the first shock of surprise and curiosity, he was aware only that a strange, new torment possessed him, which was like the anguish he had felt in Hell and yet was joyful, and that he longed to fling himself upon this lovely creature even as he had flung himself that morning on the flowery earth, and press his face to it and weep. From where he stood he could have touched it. He put out his hand, but losing courage, drew it back again. For just as he had feared to approach the man of God, he feared now to touch the angel, lest its delicate spirit should receive a hurt. And so he remained until the angel turned and bent nearer

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to the pool, when he moved forward also and bent over and looked long and happily at the face that was mirrored with his own in the clear water. He was still standing there when he heard a voice calling through the woods.

"Basilea! Basilea!" it cried. "Father Cyriacus is here. Come quickly!"



CHAPTER III

THE girl beside the pool rose to her feet and at the same instant Tamael sprang high into the air. Had the earth swung up above his head and the firm cup of the skies slipped down, causing him and every object in the world to swim together in inextricable confusion, he would not have been more shaken. Yet he did not move far from Basilea but continued to hover over her as she walked through the wood and on across the garden, and it was not until she disappeared at last into the fine white house that Tamael, restored it seemed by her departure, gave a second leap into the air and flew away as fast as his trembling wings would carry him.

But it was not the thought that his angelic vision was a woman that had startled him, nor yet the need to fit her lovely face and figure to the name that was the scandal of old women and the toast of herdsmen. Tamael's mind had turned itself about, and since Basilea was beautiful and virtuous it was those others who were vile, and since Basilea was worthy to be loved, it was Satan who had lied in saying that women were scheming creatures, made

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by the Lord Jehovah to spite mankind and lure the sons of Adam to destruction. Now Tamael understood the tale of Lilith and of Eve and many other matters that had been obscure to him. For now he knew that if Satan had created Lilith in order to bring strife and hatred to the world, the Lord had created Eve and all her daughters to comfort men and keep them warm and prevent them from falling into the chill hands of Satan's vampires, and also to make them seek, not for the disorder which is Hell, but for the unity which is Heaven; and though he was puzzled as to why the Lord had allowed any of these things to happen and had not from the first decided to keep man and woman safely in one spirit and in Paradise, he was glad to know that since the souls of men and fallen angels had been divided into two parts, men at least could find a semblance on the earth of this same Heavenly unity.

But again, these were not the thoughts that had alarmed him and he was not troubled by the plain fact that women could be beautiful and beloved. With the knowledge that his angelic being was a woman had come the awful reminder that he, Tamael, was a devil and that his presence might do her mischief. And so as he flew on, dreaming only of Basilea, longing only to return to her, he was pursued by the terrible reflection that if he went

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again to the white house, if he sought to live as he would want to live, forever at Basilea's side, he not only would be committing sin himself but would be causing his dear lady to sin likewise.

"There is nothing for it," said Tamael, "but to forget her;" and instantly he pictured her loveliness more clearly than before, and in his determination to efface her memory, recalled a hundred charms of which he had been unconscious hitherto—the curve of her hip as she bent over the pool, the scent of her hair, the movement of her body, supple as water and yet strong and graceful. "I must, I will forget her," repeated Tamael, very much disturbed. The lovely image he had conjured up was more tempting even than the real Basilea, and at the sight of it his wings had suddenly grown weak and he could scarcely keep himself from falling. But shame and terror held him up, and although he went in the uttermost perplexity—now flushed by the thought of Basilea's beauty, now frozen by the fear of sinning—he did not for a moment check his flight. "However wicked I may be," he said, "I will not bring loveliness and virtue to damnation."

He flew on in his bewilderment all that day, and there is no saying where he would have gone or what would have become of him if, at nightfall, Providence had not brought him to Antioch city and cast him there into another and still more star-

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ting adventure. On leaving the village he had flown straight before him, heedless of where or how he traveled, so long as he escaped from the immediate perils of temptation. He had flown so straight that the horizon of the sea beyond Antioch had remained entirely rigid, and he had flown so high that the vineyards beneath him had seemed no bigger than scattered leaves, the river no more than the trace a snail makes in the grass. And he had been content to fly in this manner. When he reached Antioch, however, the sky was dark and cold, and he was seized with the impulse to break his direct and solitary course and to fly down in great wheeling circles to the earth; and this he at once resolved to do, for he had heard many tales of Golden Antioch and had often wished to visit that famous city, to see with his own eyes the churches that were the first to be named Christian, and to touch with his own hands the walls that had held Paul and Peter and Barnabas. He had heard also of Antioch's splendors—of its circuses and theaters where players and hired murderers sinned in strange and dangerous ways for the amusement of the people—of its palaces where brazen lions roared, and birds all made of jewels sang among golden apple-trees. But he was not now concerned with these matters. In the home of the Patriarchs, he told himself, he would surely discover something that would help him to forget Basilea.

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So he started to fly down, and he had gone a fair distance before he was made aware that a new sense of confusion and discomfort had come upon him. The feeling was slight at that time, and so closely linked, moreover, with the general impressions of his descent, that he did not pay serious heed to it. The constraint that clung about his wings was but a natural weariness, he thought, and the mist that lay before his eyes was the result of staring through the shadows, or maybe it was a dampness that rose from the still invisible waters. As for the bewilderment that filled his mind, it sprang most certainly from his unhappy thoughts and from the gloomy appearance of Antioch, which he now saw stretched out all pale and chilly in the starlight and looking as unlike the picture he had formed of it as lust is unlike love. He had been told the city was beautiful by night-time as by day, that its fine colonnaded streets were always lit, its temples and public places always shining with a licentious brightness. And what he saw in fact was a vast gray shadow that indeed suggested sin but that was in no wise brilliant. Here and there he caught glimpses of the river, creeping furtively from bridge to bridge, and every now and then, as he drew nearer to the houses, he heard thin, sharp cries that might be of desire or delight or that might be of pain or fear. These sights and sounds gave a new keenness to Tamael's anxie-

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ties: Hell also could be dark and cold, and there were noises in it and things that crawled stealthily.

Yet he continued to fly round and round and down and down, and although he was convinced that something curious was happening to him, it did not come into his mind to stay his wings or even to question where he might ultimately be carried. He flew as in a trance, past towers that pointed at him out of the darkness, and hillsides that seemed empty but for the herds of horned animals that jumped up at his approach and fled away; and still he went, faster and faster, nearer and yet nearer to the ground, until he was at last so low that he could plainly distinguish the stones and cypresses of a cemetery and a house, standing hard by the graveyard wall. And it was only when he found himself caught in a column of evil-smelling smoke that issued from an opening in the roof of the house, that he understood what Fate had done to him. For his nose was sensitive; he recognized the smell of burning flesh, of blood, sickly scents of aloes and ambergris and incense; and he knew then that the smoke was the smoke of a sorcerer's fire, a part of the ceremonies performed within the house by just such a man as Satan had warned him of, saying, "The magicians will make you work, Tamael, whether you like it or not!" "Alas! Alas!" sighed Tamael. "What will become of me? O dear Basilea! Why did I not stay

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with you?" But his sighs, his groans, his struggles were useless. The spells held him securely, and he had spun for but a moment in their horrid grip when a gust of wind that seemed to spring at once and most surprisingly from the four corners of the quiet night, seized him and thrust him down into the hidden fire.

So Tamael came into the sorcerer's chamber; and he was so bewildered by the suddenness of the event and by the clamors of his conscience ("Have I sinned?" he wondered, remembering that he had wished to visit Antioch), and by his dread of what the spells might do to him, that all he knew of his descent was a splashing of flames as he alighted in the brazier, and a noise of rushing winds as the strange gale swept back whence it had sprung, and then his own voice speaking the words he was constrained to speak. "Here I am—what do you want of me?" he said, and closed his eyes and waited for the full violence of the spells to break upon him.

But nothing happened, and opening his eyes, he saw that the place to which he had come was dark and altogether quiet. There was no light in it save the light of the fire, and this was so feeble and spread such a little way that Tamael could only discover part of the hideous objects that were disposed in a circle round the brazier; and of the men who stood within the circle he could see only two white,

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staring faces, hung like masks against a wall of shadow. There was no movement save the now subdued leaping of the flames and the slow curling and uncurling of the smoke, and there was no sound of any kind. The two men neither spoke nor cried out nor made the slightest gesture, and the creatures that lay about the fire were dead and gave no sign.

And in this unexpected and intolerable quiet, Tamael's last breath of courage was crushed out and he could only stand and gape at the men whose awful spells had caught and held and plucked him down and would presently compel him to fulfill some unknown but surely odious duty. All about them, oppressive as the waters of a stagnant pool, was silence and the odor of corruption; and in this utter stillness it was plain that the men also were very much afraid. They stood as motionless as if the silence and the fetid shadows were indeed a slime in which they were stuck fast; the sweat of fear was on their faces; their eyelids twitched; their voices, when at last their lips were freed and they began to whisper together in the darkness, were choked and painful. "Is it the devil?" said the first. "It is the devil," replied the one whom Tamael knew to be the sorcerer. "Are those his eyes?" asked the other. "There, in the smoke?" "Yes, yes," said the sorcerer, "I see him clearly;" whereat his companion gave a little gasp. "Question him, Arnaphas,"

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he said. "I drip with terror." And the sorcerer, opening his mouth, closing it, opening it again, prepared to address the devil.

"What? Oh! what will they make me do?" thought Tamael. The sorcerer was speaking. In low, half-strangled tones, jerking his way, as it were, through the density of silence that enfolded him, he was reciting the prayers and incantations that Tamael had foreseen, had in fact braced himself, but a moment before, to encounter. But now it was the manner in which they were said rather than the hateful words themselves that troubled Tamael. For he had expected pride, dignity, a rigor of authority which, reminding him of Satan, would have enforced his humblest, most unquestioning obedience. He had expected a strong tide of evil that would have entirely submerged him, stifling all thought, drowning all sensation; and, alas! the sorcerer's timidities and hesitations left him free to suffer every particularity of his disgusting situation. "In the name of Abrahel, of Zepphar, of Ukobach, I call upon you, devil——" said the sorcerer, and Tamael, unresisting as a puppet, made his responses. Yet all the while he was aware of everything in the chamber, and especially of those corpses and other obscene objects that lay about the fire (although he would not look at them, so cruelly did they offend his modesty), and he was aware, too, of their meaning and

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of their morality, and why the passions of which they were the symbols were the most potent in Black Magic, and why lust was indeed the greatest blasphemy.

He would not look at them. But at the two men who stood before him he was compelled to look, and here again was the same sacrilege, incarnate in the thick nostrils, the gross lips and heavy cheeks of the sorcerer's companion. He was the older yet the more vigorous of the two. Beside the other's thin, sunken features, his nose arched boldly, his protruding eyes shone in their folds of sagging flesh, his big head hung forward like a bull's when it first scents the heifer. And while Tamael continued (meekly still, yet with ever increasing apprehension) to give his answers to the sorcerer's litany, he gazed intently at this second man and felt, what he had never felt before for any living being, a distaste so strong that it could only be called hatred. "He is old," thought Tamael, "yet he is more eager in his wickedness than the other. It is for his sake that I have been brought here." And sure enough, a moment later, the sorcerer spoke his companion's name and, having completed his last incantations, bade the devil know that the task he had been summoned to perform was "to help Caius Porcellus Galla, merchant and citizen of Rome, in his desires."

"And what are they?" asked Tamael. Suddenly

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for no reason that he could define, his fears had multiplied a hundredfold. Maybe it was the accumulated horror of the place, the smell, the attitudes of the dead creatures, his hatred of them and of the merchant? Maybe it was the terror that oozed from the two men as truly as the sweat oozed from their foreheads? Or maybe it was some hidden, unacknowledged instinct cried out in him, now that the orisons were all concluded and the real object of them was to be disclosed? Tamael knew only that as the sorcerer proceeded to explain the nature of his client's wishes and what the devil must do in order that they should be satisfied, the bitter water came into his mouth and his heart leaped up against his ribs and then—or so he fancied—lay quite still.

For he had lost all hope. "This man," said the sorcerer, "desires to possess a certain virgin. It is your business, devil, to direct her to his bed. You will go from Antioch to a village that lies in the hills near by the river, and there you will seek out the house of the freedman Philondas. He is the father of the girl and the most considerable landlord of those parts. You cannot mistake his house; it is the largest in the village and it has a garden wherein are lawns and streams and woods and vineyards and all kinds of shrubs and flowers. And when you have come into the house you will bind yourself wholly to the girl and you will endeavor by every means in your power

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to tempt and to seduce her so that presently she will become this gentleman's whore. These are my orders. Go now and obey them."

Thus quietly, in terms so simple that they allowed no possibility of error, was Tamael's hope of virtue taken from him. And it seemed to him that he had always expected this, that from the moment Michael had flung him from the battlements of Heaven, he had been foredoomed to know the worst that Hell and the enemies of God could offer.

"What is the girl's name?" he asked. "Basilea," said the sorcerer; and Tamael heard no further sound in that most dreadful place save an exclamation from the sorcerer and a hoarse whisper that broke, under the impulse, apparently, of uncontrollable astonishment, from the lips of Caius Porcellus. "Look! Look!" gasped the merchant. "What a strange thing! The devil weeps!"



CHAPTER IV

*T*AMAEEL did not go directly to the village. Passing through the sorcerer's roof, he flew a short distance—far enough to test the recovered freedom of his wings and to feel the air blow once more upon his face—and then, alighting, made his way on foot over the waste ground and through the mean streets that led from the graveyard to the busier quarters of the city. And as he walked he repeated to himself the words Satan had spoken: "The Lord made you a devil, a devil you must remain." "This is the end," he thought, and despair closed round him, a dark prison from which there was no escaping. Wherever he turned he met the same alarm, the same perplexities. If he allowed his mind to dwell on the awful mission he must presently accomplish, his very spirit sickened; yet if he remembered that this same awful mission would bring him to Basilea, he was filled with shameful exultation. He longed to go at once to the garden; yet if he pictured Basilea's sweetness and the wickedness of his desires, horror seized him and he would put off the hour of temptation as long as possible. "But what can I do?" he

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cried. Willy-nilly he must go to her! And now in his despair he grew defiant, for it was Providence itself that had set him on this path, and since there was no turning back, he must go forward blindly, snatching such comfort as he might discover by the way. All he could do, in truth, was to be reconciled to his own fate, which was to commit evil; and so, resolving to fling aside his scruples, he began to dream of sinning, both in the manner suggested by the sorcerer (which, if he was clever, would bind him for a considerable time to his beloved) and in other manners. Yet there was one circumstance that hindered him as he mused on his future wickedness: he did not know the means by which devils worked upon the hearts of women. He must learn these things, he determined; he must become skilled, and that as quickly as might be, in the practices of evil.

So he went brooding through the darkness (for the night lay close about Antioch) and he was still pondering how he could best acquire villainy, when he came upon a sight that seemed, to his distracted mind, to offer him relief. He had reached the first of the big market-places, and there he saw an old woman and a young girl hurrying along beneath the arches. They were about to go into a large tent that stood in one corner of the square and from which there issued a great noise of drums and pipes and voices shouting. But before they lifted the leather

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curtain of the tent they stopped, for Tamael had recognized the old woman and had seen that she was not an old woman but a devil he had known in Hell, and thinking, "This is my opportunity," had cried out, "Ho! Barshamoth! Come, talk to me!" Instantly the old woman vanished; the girl, much startled, ran off down a side alley, and the devil, resuming his natural shape, turned angrily to Tamael. "Why did you do that?" he asked. "Could we not talk without your bawling out my name? Now you have lost me the girl altogether."

"It is of no importance," said Tamael wearily. "You will find others." And because his heart was so heavy, despite his determination to be wicked, that he must needs speak or sink utterly beneath the weight of it, he started to tell Barshamoth something of his troubles and to explain that he was dedicated to the temptation of a Christian maiden and did not know how to set about the business. Borne onward by the stream of his unhappiness, now suddenly released, he would have said more, but when he sought to pronounce the name Basilea he could not; nor could he relate the true cause of his distress, which was that he must assist in the damnation of a beloved mistress. And so he ended foolishly enough: "It is my first great work and I am so ignorant that I shall not perform it fittingly unless you help me, Barshamoth."

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The tale restored his companion to good humor. "My poor Tamael," he said. "You always were a fool. There is no hardship in the matter, although girls may be a trifle more difficult to tempt than women. They are afraid. After Eve's greed, the Lord Jehovah saw to it that the first bite of the apple was made bitter. But that is nothing. Why! I should have caught the little one you saw as soon as I had got her to the tent there!" And having told Tamael of the wrestling bouts that were being held that night in the tent, and of the music and the drinking that accompanied them, and how he had seduced the girl merely by promising her a glimpse of these delights, he proposed that Tamael should go with him and watch the fights and see for himself the ease with which females could be brought to sinning. "There will be women of all sorts," he said; "costers and slaves and perhaps even fine ladies from the palaces, who sup among roses and syringa and then come here for a breath of homely sweat for sake of contrast." "And will that really help me?" Tamael asked. Listening to his companion's speech, he had been taken once again with violent distaste. He no longer wished to stay with Barshamoth, far less to go into the tent and to see fighting and caresses. A vision rose before his eyes of trees and cool waters; but even as he looked at it, his mind became confused, his limbs trembled and he was ashamed.

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"Yes, let us go," he said; and they went into the tent, and being invisible, set themselves down beside the ring in the best and most convenient places.

They had arrived at the conclusion of a fight. Already the beaten man had risen from the ground, and the crowd of men and women who sat huddled together on the floor of the tent, vented, as it seemed, their rage at his defeat. From their lips came howls, groans, curses, jeers and hootings; from their hands flew lemon and orange and pomegranate skins, the rinds of watermelons, chicken and mutton bones and handfuls of earth, and from their lips again, the pith and pulp of fruit, spat directly on to the man's face and naked body so that he dripped with crimson juices as with blood. The air was full of din, for, besides the shouting of the mob, the players that crouched beside the ring blew on their pipes and beat vigorously on their drums. The only person who made no sound at that moment was the victor. He stood within the ring, his chin a little raised, his eyes fixed proudly upon space, one leg straight, the other advanced and bending at the knee, his enormous arms crossed above the spreading waves of flesh that were his stomach and his belly. Another man, the director of the fights, stood by him, with a fat woman, much bedizened, who carried a brass dish. Talking quietly, these two waited for the storm to pass.

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"Why are they so angry with the man?" asked Tamael, turned from his own preoccupations by profound astonishment. "Because he did not win," said Barshamoth. "The big one is Marius, a famous wrestler from Massilia. He has come here to challenge the men of Antioch, and the people do not like to see their champions beaten. But these fighters do not concern us," he went on; "they are damned already;" and he bade Tamael consider rather the women who were in the tent, and note their attitudes and their demeanor, for, he declared, the understanding of women was the beginning of infernal wisdom. "Look at the Armenian in the scarlet dress," he said, "how she leans across her neighbor. You would suppose her gown could scarcely bear the strain, it is so tight and she so eager! Look at that other one, how she wags the rings that hang below her ears. She is thinking that some man will notice them, even if he does not heed the face between. And look at the Greek in the long veils. She draws herself aside, the little fox, and pretends to care only for the beaten man and the way he staggers to his place! But see!—for all that her veils are loose, how cleverly she gathers them about her! One need not be a carver to make out that she could pose for Venus! Oh! I know them!" he boasted. "I know them! They are as ripe as plums in Autumn. I should have but to say a word into their ears for them

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to pitch straight into their neighbors' arms!" He stopped and leaned forward, the better to examine the women, and there was a keenness in his eyes and a greed upon his lips that made Tamael fear he would give an immediate demonstration of his powers. But he did not, for at that moment a tall Nubian came into the tent, followed by a woman, whose remarkable appearance—remarkable at least in such a place—at once absorbed the whole of Barshamoth's attention. She was not young or handsome; her dress was simple, the ornaments she wore were neither beautiful nor costly, yet she bore herself so proudly and took her place beside the ring with so much freedom that even Tamael thought, "This is a great lady."

"What did I tell you?" whispered Barshamoth, plucking eagerly at Tamael's arm. "It is Laura, the Roman General's wife, and her slave Nemo. They are well known in all the drinking-booths of Antioch." And indeed, although the crowd paid small heed to them, it was evident that the newcomers had been recognized. The fat woman laid down her dish and hastened to bring them wine, a boy ran forward, offering fruit and flowers, and the director of the fights, ceasing to wait upon the people's pleasure, stepped to the center of the ring and called loudly for another bout, another champion. "Men of Antioch!" he cried, "bring out your fighters. Marius

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of Massilia is waiting!" The woman stretched herself familiarly upon the ground. "This place," she said, "smells like a lion's cage." But she gave no sign of distaste. She stared at Marius, and Tamael saw the devil Barshamoth grin as he watched her changed expression. Without a word he crept towards her and settled by her side, his lips close to her ear, his arms almost enfolding her. The wrestler, meanwhile, appeared entirely indifferent, yet Tamael fancied that he, too, was conscious of the woman's long, appraising look; he did not move, he did not even turn his eyes in her direction, but his immense body seemed to swell to still more prodigious proportions, he gazed more proudly at the nothingness before him.

And it was with this same air of perfected arrogance, of strength increased, fulfilled by pride, as though the look that he had brought into the woman's face swelled in his muscles, hardened in his bones, that Marius fought his second fight. The bout was short. A man stepped into the ring and the two wrestlers faced each other, half crouching, their heads and shoulders swinging slowly from side to side. Suddenly they locked hands, swayed heavily, stamping and dancing with their feet, and then Marius bore down upon his adversary (like a great stone, thought Tamael, like a crashing tree, like a waterfall of flesh), caught him and turned him

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about. The other sank to the ground, writhed and lay still, and the winner, standing over him, allowed his eyes to rest for an instant on the lady Laura's.

Once again the people yelled their disappointment and their fury; once again the air was full of curses and of missiles, flung violently at the fallen champion by indignant lips and fingers. But Tamael at that time did not heed the crowd. He looked from Marius to the woman and from the woman to the devil crouching behind her, and listened to the words that Barshamoth spoke, and followed, half fascinated, half repelled, the answer that the Lady Laura gave to these unheard but seemingly most potent promptings. During the fight she had remained quite still, watching the wrestlers with a slow yet eager satisfaction, as though the sight of the men's vigor, the twisting of their limbs, the bending of their bodies, were some delicious draught that she drank thirstily. But when the last tremor had gone out of the fallen man she became more animated. She drew herself up, her bosom shaking (for she was a stoutish woman, amply rounded), and signed to the director of the fights, who was now walking to and fro before the ring, a little shovel full of incense in his hand, that he should come to her. As he drew near, she stretched out an arm to her slave Nemo's ear and plucked from it a big gold ring, which she tossed lazily to the director, bidding him,

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with a gesture, carry it to Marius. She did not speak; the slave passed his hand once over his bleeding ear and fell again into impassivity; the director of the fights, having fulfilled the errand, resumed his business, which was to add the scent of incense to the smell of sweat and unwashed bodies that was already in the tent.

Meanwhile, all around them, the uproar continued. In vain the musicians played; in vain the boy ran hither and thither with his wreaths of jasmine and of orange flowers; in vain the fat woman brought out her jars of wine and waved her wooden cups aloft, entreating the people to use their mouths for pleasure rather than for oaths. Nothing would soothe them; and as Tamael turned from looking at the lady, he saw that their anger must soon break into more definite violence, for now the squealing of the pipes and the thudding of the drums were scarcely heard, and there were stones in the people's hands as well as earth and offal. The director of the fights himself appeared concerned. A stone had struck his shovel, scattering the contents on every side, and as his stout partner bent to gather up the coals—"My Hercules," he muttered. "The bastards will destroy the tent!" But he, too, could do nothing. He tried a protest but it was drowned in the surrounding clamor; and at last in desperation, he called to where Marius stood, as unmoved with it

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all, and as apparently unmovable, as a rock exposed to gentle winds and the lapping of mild waves. "Hey! Marius!" he said. "You have a big voice. Speak to them." And obediently, though very proudly still, erect and majestic, Tamael thought, as a tower walking, the big man went to the center of the ring and let forth, without warning, in the calmest yet loudest tone imaginable, a prodigious stream of evil-sounding curses. Tamael leaned towards his neighbor. "Let us go," he whispered anxiously. "There will surely be murder." But Barshamoth did not answer.

And a moment later the violence Tamael had foreseen broke out, and that in a very sudden and alarming manner. For the wrestler, by his most unexpected speech, had drawn the people's wrath upon himself, and he had hardly taken breath after his volley of oaths, when all the yelling and abuse was turned on him and all the stones that had been falling on the beaten man, were flung in his direction. At first he affected not to heed them. One struck his leg, a second struck his shoulder, and still the armor of his dignity was unimpaired, he still continued, though somewhat more fiercely, to call for quiet. It was only when a third stone, better aimed, hit him smartly on the cheek, that his indifference dropped from him and he became, on the instant, furious. With a shout he sprang forward,

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caught up the biggest of the wine-jars and swung it like a club above his head. He did not know which man, in that dense crowd, had struck the blow, but he had seen, immediately before him, a certain tall, blond soldier, who sat smiling, as it seemed, a trifle contemptuously; and so, his rigidity melting into a very torrent of rage, the wrestler waved the jar and hurled it with all his strength at the soldier.

A scene of uttermost confusion followed. The wine-jar crashed, missing the soldier who had leaped aside, but stunning two other men, cutting a third man's head so that the blood spurted from it in a fountain, and covering the whole group with wine and fragments. And at once, as though released by the falling of that thunderbolt, a whirlwind of fury swept the tent: all the women screamed, all the men jumped up and rushed towards the ring, knocking over and trampling upon the director of the fights and his stout partner, and breaking every object they encountered—pots, cups, trays of fruit and flowers, stools and benches. They intended to destroy Marius; and Tamael, who had watched their onslaught with considerable agitation, fully expected them to do so. At the outbreak of the tumult, even as the wrestler swung his monstrous weapon and the soldier stared at him with astonishment and indignation, Tamael had jumped to his feet and would have run from the tent in horror. He knew the soldier had not cast

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the stone or otherwise insulted Marius, and he could not bear, he thought, to see an innocent man slaughtered. At the same moment, however, it came into his mind that murder, being evil, was of those things that he must study patiently, and also that he had never in all his life seen a real battle, not even that first awful battle that well-nigh every devil, every angel witnessed, the fight of Michael and of Lucifer. And because of these thoughts, Tamael remained with his comrade Barshamoth, and saw the wine-jar's fall and the havoc that it made, and saw the soldier, nimbly avoiding it, fling himself on Marius to smite him, and saw too, as the big man reeled and the crowd surged forward to destroy him utterly, that it was the soldier who got between the people and their vengeance. "Leave him to me!" Tamael heard him shout, and strangely enough, the crowd stood still, and the mighty whirlwind that had swept the tent was resolved, of a sudden, into one small eddy, which was the fight of Marius and the soldier. On the edge of it, the lady Laura clung to her slave Nemo's arm, trembling (as Lilith perhaps trembled when her fate and Hell's was in the balance), yet looking at the men with eager, shining eyes.

And indeed, the struggle between Marius and the man whom he had sought to kill was a remarkable sight, and Tamael himself, if he had not been conscious all the while of the devil Barshamoth's whis-

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perings and the lady Laura's pleasure, might have enjoyed its excitements and its stresses, its moments of terror and of wild relief, its tremblings and tossings and curious swift caperings. From the outset Tamael saw that Marius was very much bewildered, not only by the first blow he had received but generally by his adversary's behavior. It seemed he was not well accustomed to the leaping forward, smiting, leaping back, that was the soldier's practice, and although his great arms swung wide and his huge body plunged here and there as fast as it was able, he could not escape the other's attack nor reply to it as he should. There was something in the spectacle, Tamael thought, of goats at play, of cocks such as he had seen that morning in the village, something also of the serpents that were the familiar images of Hell; and this especially when Marius succeeded, as he did from time to time, in grasping his opponent by the waist, and the two bodies fell to the ground so coiled and twisted together that they bore no longer the aspect of individual men but of one oddly struggling monster. These last occasions were very terrible to Tamael. He was so afraid lest they should be the soldier's end, that when they threatened he forgot the foul comments Barshamoth was making on the appearance of the fighters; forgot the new excitement that the devil's words were breeding in the lady Laura; forgot the clenched fists and grin-

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ning faces of the crowd; forgot even that his own voice could not be heard, and cried, "Take care! Take care!" with the lustiest of the assembled people. But the soldier did not need the warning. Always he escaped the final clasp of the great arms, always his litheness slid from under the great belly and he was up again and capering in the peculiar way he had and hitting Marius with vigor and precision.

And soon these quick, darting blows had their effect and it was plain that the big wrestler weakened. Every moment his bewilderment became more marked, his clumsiness more and more apparent. Now all his thrusts fell short and all his adversary's told, so that he was struck not once but many times upon the cheeks, the nose, the ears. Now he was altogether dazed; he swayed to and fro; blood poured from him; his head hung forward and he could only move his fists feebly before it like a man trying to ward off a swarm of bees. One last blow upon the jaw and he dropped senseless; he was beaten. The soldier stepped from the ring, and Tamael woke once more to the yelling mob and the greed of the devil Barshamoth and the quivering presence of the lady Laura.

He liked them less even than before. In fact he disliked them so much that those last moments in the tent, while the people shrieked and danced with

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joy, and the lady Laura obeyed the impulses that Barshamoth had put into her mind, and Marius lay stunned and forgotten, were almost as bitter as any he had known that day. He was ashamed of the share he had taken in the mob's excitement; he felt only pity for the wrestler—lying there despoiled of pride and strength—and hatred for himself and every one about him.

In particular he loathed the lady Laura; for although he had been conscious of the ardors that possessed her, although he had seen her desire for the wrestler wane, her desire for the soldier kindle, he had not expected her to yield to her new passion as openly, as shamelessly, as she did. Throughout the fight she had stared at the soldier, and Tamael had felt her eagerness grow and grow until, at the end of it, her hands and all her thick body trembled and the expression of her eyes was more greedy than the devil Barshamoth's. She was like some hungry beast that waits to fall upon its prey; and now as the soldier paused and wiped his face and neck, she did actually spring upon him, gasping out such words and caressing him in such a manner that Tamael, after an instant's disgusted contemplation, turned abruptly and then went out of the tent.

Barshamoth, his work concluded, followed after him. "You see?" he cried, rubbing his hands. "You see——?" But this time it was Tamael who would

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not answer. He had seen that the woman's eyes were strangely dulled, that her cheeks had become loose and sagging, that her open mouth drooped at the corners. And he recalled Basilea's sweet lips and fresh, smooth skin, firm as new fruit, and wondered how he could have so befouled himself as to think of kissing and caresses in her presence. He was emptied of every sensation save tenderness and a deep longing to be with her, peacefully, in the quiet garden. "Farewell, Barshamoth," he said, and without waiting for any further comment or counsel, he flew away towards the village.





BOOK II



CHAPTER V

SO Tamael returned to the house of Philondas, Basilea's father, and the joy of his return was such that for a time its brightness outshone every other feeling. Actually he did not go into the house that night, for although the ugly things that he had witnessed had cleansed him of all gross, carnal thoughts, he was not bold enough to visit Basilea in her chamber or to watch her sleeping. Instead he went into the glade where he had first discovered her and laid himself down beneath the willows; and there, in the restored delight of quiet and sweet scents, a measure of his bitterness was purged away. For no reason save that he was near Basilea, the net that Fate had drawn about him slackened; he no longer felt that he was dragged, helpless and struggling, towards some unknown evil. To be with his beloved was soothing, restful as a homecoming.

At dawn he rose and walked through the garden, and still his sense of freedom lingered. The dew was on the grass and on the quivering spiders'-webs that hung from bush to bush; the low sunshine crept in and out between the trees; swallows darted hither

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and thither. In a grove of palm-trees, Tamael paused and listened to the rustling, high above his head, of a little breeze. Only the topmost palms were stirred. Below, all about Tamael, was a quietness deeper than the night's silence, and sweeter, since it was awake.

And presently Basilea came from the house, and Tamael saw again the beauty that he had likened to the beauty of the angels. Now it was to him the very loveliness of the lovely garden, and as he looked at it he was filled with wonder and with pain. It was as though his heart soared up and in the same moment was struck down; he was pierced at once by two conflicting ecstasies. But the second, which was terror of the harm that he must do her, did not remain with him that day, nor did it, for many days, outlast the first instant of their meeting. For, despite the sorcerer's enchantment, he found that he was not compelled to speak to her. He was free, it seemed, to choose the hour of temptation; and reflecting on this circumstance, he became so glad that he would have danced for joy of it if he had not been too bemused with staring at Basilea's beauty to move in any way. There was no need, he thought, to begin his odious duties now. Indeed it would be mere idle foolishness to do so. Basilea stood gazing across the garden, and her face was innocent as the new morning. Her eyes rested tenderly upon the

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trees, the streams, the flowers that the Lord had made; her parted lips smiled praise of His good handiwork. No doubt, thought Tamael, she had come straight from prayer, so that even if he sought to tempt her, his wickedness would be of no avail. Most certainly there would be time to think of evil things to-morrow.

And so, on that day and on many further days, he followed Basilea to the house, and went with her to the room where her father and the good Cyriacus sat and ate and discoursed of holy matters, and to the kitchen where Petronilla, the house-keeper, worked and scolded, and to the byres and the beehives and the garden and wherever Basilea went—always excepting her own private chamber—and said no word at all. Sometimes he was made glad by what he thus discovered, and sometimes he was made a trifle anxious, though never enough, in those days, to wound the heart of his content or to destroy the notion which he had that he was near returned to Heaven. His chief delight was to be with Basilea and the good man Cyriacus when they talked together, for then he knew that she was safe, and that if some wicked impulse of his own were unexpectedly to spring upon him, it could not possibly find vent. And happily for Tamael, these moments of undisturbed delight were frequent. The holy man came often to the house, and it was plain

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that Basilea loved him dearly. She would run from whatever place she might be in and kneel and kiss the cross he carried in his bosom and receive his blessing very reverently. And when he had asked her how her soul did, and she had answered "Well, I trust, dear father," the holy man would seat himself upon a stool or upon one of the many grassy banks that were in the garden, and the girl would nestle like some pretty animal at his feet and listen with great earnestness while he related stories of the angels and the saints and of the blessed Apostles and of the Christ Jesus, in the days when He walked among the flowers and wrought the sparrows that were made of mud into gracious, living creatures.

Yet even these encounters were not always peaceful. It might be that Basilea would run to them too hastily, and there would be traces upon her lips of the geranium juices with which, as Tamael knew, she was wont at times to paint herself. Or it might be that the holy man would come unheralded to the garden and surprise her twining chaplets for her neck or wreaths of roses for her hair. When this happened Cyriacus would be displeased and would reprove Basilea, telling her that she gave too much thought to her beauty, and that if she did not curb her vanity, it would surely drag her into the deadliest pits of sin.

"Do you not know," he said, "that the adornments

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of the flesh are as blackness and putridity in the sight of Heaven? Do you not remember Pelagia, who lived but a short while ago in our own city of Antioch, and was likened by the pagans to a pearl, so dazzling were the silks and jewels that she wore? Yet when Nero, the holy Bishop of Heliopolis, saw her, she was a filthy black crow and stank most vilely. Do you not remember Margarita, who had no finer garment than the shift of a poor shepherdess, yet gained the martyr's palm and was called 'Pearl' in Paradise?"

"Was she really beautiful?" asked Basilea.

"As beautiful as her name," said Cyriacus. "The perfect Olybrius was so enflamed with love for her that he offered her marriage. But she, being virtuous and a Christian, despised his heathenish desires, whereupon he cast her into prison and from thence brought her to the rack, in the hope that by suffering she would be persuaded to deny her faith and be his wife. She was so beautiful that all the people wept, and the impudent Olybrius himself hid his face in his mantle that he might not see such loveliness perish. But the beauty of her spirit was greater than the beauty of her body, for he had promised her wealth and every worldly happiness, yet she repulsed him."

"But surely Olybrius was an old man?" said Basilea. And this time Cyriacus made no answer.

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They were walking that day in the direction of the glade that was Tamael's nightly resting-place, and for a while the good man went in silence, forgetful of the sunlight and the shade, the chirping grasshoppers and Basilea. It was only when they reached the pool and had sat down upon its bank that he resumed his argument. Tamael, respectful and attentive, sat a little way behind them.

"Beauty," said Cyriacus, "was given to women to try them. To man the Lord gave thought, and to woman, loveliness, in order that they should be tested, each according to his ability. The tale of the servant who received five talents and wrought them into ten, and of the servant who received two talents and wrought them into four, shows that every man is judged by the increase that his own efforts bring to the Lord's gifts. Beauty and thought are meant to bear fruit and multiply before the Lord, even as seed bears fruit and multiplies. And since there is no means of increasing woman's beauty save by adding to it spiritual worth, it is required of her that she should be virtuous. You have been given considerable loveliness, my daughter. Beware that you do not become like the servant who received one piece of money and hid it in a napkin. Beware that you come not to the Judgment Seat with no talent save the one which is the Lord's and not your own!"

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"But may I not increase it?" asked Basilea, "by putting roses in my hair? Can this not also please the angels?"

"No," said the saint severely. "No!"

He looked at Basilea; and Tamael was distressed to see that there was sadness in his eyes as well as indignation. During the good man's speech, the devil had crept nearer and nearer to the pool, for he was much interested in what he heard, and much concerned, also, to observe the faces of the saint and of the maiden and to watch the gravity and fond reproach that deepened on the one, the brooding and astonishment and wistfulness that passed, each in its turn, over the other. He had quite forgotten his own devilish character and the extreme insolence of his position. He was sitting close beside Cyriacus when the good man concluded his remark. "Such thoughts are vanity," he said, "and vanity and all unprofitable movements of the soul are works of Hell. Do not forget, Basilea, that there are devils all around you. If you put flowers in your hair and gauds about your neck, you will not please the angels but the devils!" And Tamael was so violently surprised by these words that he leaped up and his foot slipped and he fell with a great splash into the pool.

The accident, however, had no special consequence. As Tamael dropped, the saint glanced mildly at the water. "Was that a fish?" he asked, to which

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Basilea answered, "I think so, father," whereupon their curiosity went from them and they returned to their discourse. As for Tamael, he was much alarmed, both by the abruptness of his fall and by the knowledge that his presence could be made manifest, in howsoever small a measure, to human senses. But he did not reflect long upon the matter, for he had no sooner crawled back to his former seat than the saint began to chide Basilea very severely, so that her wistfulness was turned to shame and she wept; and at this sight, all Tamael's thoughts were swallowed up by overwhelming misery. He did not know which he felt most, the pain of his beloved's tears or his own sorrow that they should be deserved and the saint's reproaches just.

For Tamael had noticed Basilea's love of pretty things, of silks and ribbons, colored stones and flowers, and it had made him anxious. Either because there were no mirrors in the house or because she feared her father's anger, she would bring these trinkets to the pool, and there, leaning over the water, would spend long hours disposing them about her person. At times she would do no more than comb her hair and set the flowers in it, or tie scraps of pebble to a cord and hang them on her forehead or her ears; or again she would clean her nails with little knives and polish them with fine white powder

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and stain them, hands and feet alike, with the geranium juices she used to paint her lips. But at other times, thinking herself alone, she would do bolder things—untie her girdle maybe, and then, still peering at her reflection in the water, try how this or that piece of silk looked best, stretched tight across her breasts or held in folds upon her shoulder. And Tamael, sighing, blushing, trembling, watched and turned away and watched again, in a very fury of alarm and admiration.

Nor was Basilea's love of ornament his only reason for anxiety. Upon the lowest borders of her father's lands, below the beehives and their banks of thyme and marjoram and honeysuckle, was a meadow full of wild flowers. It was the most secluded corner of the garden. No slave or servant was allowed to go there, lest the bees should be disturbed in their morning flight or in their evening homecoming. And in this meadow Basilea walked at times and picked the flowers or sat with her distaff and spindle beneath its one great fig-tree. And here the village hinds and shepherds, on their way to the more distant pastures, would catch sight of her and stop beside the meadow's wall to speak to her and ask her for a flower or a kiss. And though she seldom answered them and never gave them what they asked, Tamael did not like to see these rustic youths or hear their ribaldries.

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One was especially persistent. His name was Hylas, and he was the youth whom Tamael had encountered on his first day on earth, sighing and crying in the orchard. He and his friend Eriphos were shepherds, and whether by accident or by design, it never chanced that Basilea went to the meadow but that Hylas and Eriphos brought their flocks to graze in the same neighborhood. If other youths were by, then Hylas kept aloof and nothing was known of him save the distant music of his pipes. But if Basilea were alone, then Eriphos would guard the sheep and Hylas would come bounding to the meadow's side to gaze upon the girl and to entreat her pity.

And Tamael saw that Basilea was kindlier disposed towards this youth than towards all his fellows. Whereas with the others she was very proud, scorning their prayers, their jests, rejecting the offerings they brought her of fruit or skins or jars of honey, with Hylas she was gentle, and would allow him to talk to her or play to her upon his pipe, or even to climb over the wall and the spiked cactus bushes that grew beside it, and sit with her beneath the fig-tree. "Of the others," Tamael thought, "she is afraid, because she knows that they desire her. But of this one she is not afraid, because she knows he loves her truly." And in spite of his distaste for such intimacies, he felt a liking for the lad and was sorry

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when Basilea teased him, which she did continually, or laughed at his simple, clownish manners.

For Hylas was still somewhat uncouth and clumsy. The down upon his lips and chin gave him an unwashed air; his limbs were loosely knit so that he moved shamblingly, like a colt, and he was so much stronger than he knew that often his gestures were rough when he had meant them to be tender. On one occasion when Basilea had bidden him pick her a wand of leaves that she might fan herself, he in his eagerness broke off half the branch. On another occasion, being in a mighty hurry to be with her, he leaped too high above the cactus bushes and, falling, pricked himself upon those that were within the wall. And that day, although Basilea laughed to see him tumble, his wounds distressed her, and Tamael knew that Hylas was gladder of the blood upon his legs than he had ever been for any comeliness.

“My poor Hylas,” said Basilea, when he had stanchd his wounds and had sat down beside her. “Why are you so wild and leaping? You are like a ram, forever butting and pushing and springing here and there. Some day you will indeed jump too far and fall and kill yourself.”

The youth sighed. “You know well,” he said, “that I am made half mad by love of you. Would you be sorry if I fell, as you say, and died?”

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"Yes, very sorry," said Basilea. "They tell me you are as strong as any herdsman in the village and can throw a steer at one turn of its horns. What would we do if all our best shepherds flung themselves from the high rocks? But that is idle talk. Men should be made gentle when they love, not wild, like rams and goats!"

So she mocked him, and the boy's simplicity could not answer her. Yet it seemed he was not altogether stupid, for, after a pause, he ceased from biting at his lip and picking at the ground as he had done while she was speaking, and summoning up his courage, asked her a question, which, by its frankness and the frankness of the answer it provoked, pleased Tamael extremely. "Is it true," asked Hylas, "that you care only for gentleness and pretty ways? They say in the village that the merchant Caius Porcellus is courting you and that maybe you will marry him because of the grand company he keeps and of the fine things that he can give you. Is that true, Basilea?" The look of wonder and of indignation that came into the girl's face was a most gracious sight, Tamael thought. "No, it is not true," she said. "Caius Porcellus is a horrid creature. He has an eye like a fish and a mouth like a frog. Besides, he is a pagan. I could never bring myself to marry him, even if my father wished it—which he does not, for they have had a bitter quarrel."

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And Tamael was so comforted to hear her that he forgave the ease her words brought also to young Hylas, and the hope and assurance they gave the boy, so that he fell at once to asking her a hundred other questions—as for example, if Basilea did not in truth set store by mere gentility, could she love a peasant?—and if a heathen shepherd were to become a Christian, would she at any time marry him?—and many such, that Tamael forgave because they were of themselves modest and matrimonial, and were, moreover, very decently and honorably said.

He forgave the questions, yet as Hylas continued to talk of love and marriage, Tamael's mood darkened, for it seemed to him that Basilea listened with more complacency than formerly. They were sitting close together now, closer than they had ever sat before; and though Hylas had often spoken in this strain, never before had Basilea heard him so patiently. She mocked the boy, yet her eyes smiled. She drew away from him when he leaned nearer, yet, a moment later, bent to him again, and with the little bunch of flowers that she carried, brushed some twig of fallen petal from his hair. "Dear Basilea," said Hylas. "Will you not let me kiss you? I swear I will be very gentle." And the girl laughed and said, "No, Hylas. Not until you have grown a beard or visited the barber. You should not think of kissing while your face is no ways—neither egg nor

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fowl!" But even as she said this she leaned forward and wiped his bleeding ankle with her kerchief. And watching her, Tamael wondered what was passing in her soul that made her so unusually kind.

And suddenly a new and very disquieting thought came to Tamael. Hylas, emboldened by Basilea's touch, had caught her hand, and she, as though to escape him, had risen swiftly to her feet. Yet she did not turn away, but stood, smiling at the boy's flushed face, most sweet and most provoking. "Please, please," Hylas whispered. "Do not say some hard things now. Just this once! Do not spoil it all!" And then, to Tamael's exceeding horror, he took her in his arms—though very tenderly, as if she were a branch of blossom that would fall if too hard crushed—and Basilea let him hold her thus until his head was bent to hers and his lips were on her cheek. Then, indeed, she broke from him and ran, laughing, across the meadow. "Farewell, wild Hylas!" she cried, still mocking him. But Tamael was not consoled by her refusal of the boy's kiss. He was so disturbed that, for the first time, he did not follow her to the house nor seek to be with her again all that day. He stayed in the meadow with the trembling Hylas. And he trembled also.

CHAPTER VI

ALL that night Tamael, lying beneath the willows, asked himself, "What has changed her so?" And all that night the same terrifying answer came, "It is your doing, Tamael." He pictured her as he had seen her that first day in the glade and that first morning in the garden—pure as the angels, innocent as the new dawn; and then he pictured her as she was under the fig-tree, teasing Hylas with her beauty and her laughter. And the more he reflected on the change that had come over his dear lady, the more certain he was that he, and he alone, had caused it. If she seemed less virtuous now, if she seemed bolder and more inclined towards men's caresses, was it not that, despite his silence, despite his care, his own devilish presence had transformed her? Was it not that, unwittingly, merely by living by her side, he had implanted his own evil in her chaste spirit? And in that moment Tamael's content was taken from him and he was filled with doubt and fear and hesitation.

He was afraid of everything he did, of everything he thought. As one day passed, then two, then three,

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and Basilea did not go again to meet the shepherd, Tamael's horror lost something of its sharpness; but self-reproach remained and terror of the messages that went, he felt sure, secretly and all unknown to him, from his mind to Basilea's. And he grew so fearful, brooding on these matters, that he began to dread the hours he spent alone with her, and instead of finding delight in walking behind her when she wandered through the woods, or in sitting not too far away when she rested beside the pool, he knew only discomfort and anxiety. And with his self-distrust came certain other thoughts that added to his dread of solitude. At times the notion of Basilea's boldness awakened horror and despair, memories of Hell, fierce flames and bitter cold; but at other times it awakened, by some perversity, fond and lovely images, vastly more disturbing than the worst alarms. On one or two occasions he could almost have found it in his heart to approach her closely, to go, perhaps, into her room at night and lean, as Hylas had leaned, near to her shoulder, to feel her gentle breath upon his face or stroke her hair while she was sleeping. These temptations were the stronger that they were not altogether new to Tamael, and there is no saying where they would have led him if, above everything, he had not feared to frighten his beloved.

And so, more than ever, he longed for the pres-

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ence of the saintly Cyriacus, for the solace of his piety, for the air of holiness he shed upon the house. No one but Cyriacus, Tamael thought, could help Basilea now. For her father, Philondas, although a good man and a strict Christian, was too busy with his own affairs, with the tending of his corn and of his vines, even to observe his daughter's outward aspect, far less to probe and to examine the condition of her soul. When Basilea, of a morning, brought him his breakfast of bread and cheese and fruit, he did not look into her face, as Tamael looked, to see how she had spent the night, if the shadows of which the Christian neighbors spoke were on her eyelids, if she moved languidly or briskly. Rather he would reprove her for some household matter, telling her she was spendthrift of millet or of flax, so that Basilea, fearing his anger, stood before him shyly, saying no word of what was in her heart.

As for Petronilla, the housekeeper, Tamael mistrusted her from the first, and he had not been long in Philondas' house before his mistrust was changed to hatred. She was a grasping, complaining woman, forever grumbling at the great work she did and the little money she received for it. Her nose was long; her mouth was pinched at the corners, and from her thin lips came a trickle of words—unceasing as the flow of water, as the croaking of frogs by

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night, as the chattering of grasshoppers by day—concerning the beauties of prosperity and the foolishness of farmers who could not acquire wealth and the ungenerosity of those who would not share what they had with the deserving. And Tamael, remembering Basilea's fondness for silks and gewgaws, disliked these conversations. He feared lest they should excite the girl to discontent, to contempt of her father's home and of simple, Christian ways, to an unbridled longing for the pretty things she loved and that Philondas denied her. It was often said in Hell that women were inconstant creatures, swayed, as the waves are swayed, by every passing breeze of fancy.

But worst of all, Petronilla, alone in that company, spoke well of Caius Porcellus. "Philondas is a fool," she said one day to Basilea. "He cries out constantly that times are bad—and so they are—and that the taxes will ruin all the farmers—and so they may. Yet he could save himself if he were not stupid as a mole that cannot see the light, and obstinate as a cockroach that goes in circles, never getting anywhere! Why does he go and quarrel with Caius Porcellus, who is the richest merchant in Antioch, and a Roman born, and can do what he likes, they say, with the Emperor's officers? If your father had been more patient, maybe Porcellus would have said a word for him at Court and kept him from the tax-collector altogether!"

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"You know quite well," said Basilea, "that Porcellus is a thief. That when he sold my father's corn in Antioch he behaved no better than a pick-pocket. He took all the profit and gave my father near to nothing. Besides he is a pagan. He worships the demon Artemis who has a hundred breasts. How can a man be so foolish and yet be honest?"

But the housekeeper was not answered. They were busy that day making a pickle of rose-petals and honey, and while they plucked the leaves and crushed the combs, and while the earthen pot into which they were about to put the mixture warmed upon the fire, Petronilla continued to murmur against Philondas and to praise Caius Porcellus. "A pagan, a pagan," she muttered. "Are the Hebrew merchants your father deals with now more honorable? Porcellus is rich and he is a Roman gentleman. Who is the freeman Philondas to quarrel with the great folk? Eheu!" she sighed. "He will be ruined and we shall starve."

She paused and put the rose-leaves in the pot; and for a while the room was quiet, and Tamael felt a trifle soothed, so pleasant was the smell of hot flowers and of honey, so warm were the shadows in the kitchen, so bright was the sunshine that came in by the open door and so peaceful the humming of the flies and the dancing of the motes in that great shaft of light. Although he knew that Petronilla had

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spoken truth and that poverty threatened, as she said, the farmers of Syria, the prospect of loss, of ruin, of hunger and distress, seemed very remote at that time. And he could see that Basilea was not considering such miseries. She was smiling, half in mockery of Petronilla's vehemence, half in pleasure at some unspoken thought. Her face and body were in shadow, yet there was a gleam of light that played upon her lips and eyes and throat; and looking at her, Tamael was reminded of his first enchantment when she had been to him a rare, angelic being, mysterious as the dim woodland sunlight and the reflections on dark waters. And it was chiefly, he thought, because Petronilla's next words woke Basilea from her dream and destroyed the spell of peacefulness that was upon her, that Tamael became angry once again.

"As for you," said Petronilla, "you have no more sense than your father. You know you are a comely girl and that comeliness is to a woman as a mine of rubies. But what do you do to help yourself? You lie in the garden all the day or listen to the tales old Cyriacus tells you when you should be planning for your future. Where will you be when Philondas has lost his money?"

"Perhaps I shall be married," said Basilea. "May I not live as other women live?"

But again it seemed her answer was not to Petro-

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nilla's taste. She was standing now beside the saucepan, stirring the sweet-smelling mixture that was in it, and as Basilea spoke she gave her spoon an angry twist and glanced so spitefully at the girl that Tamael, wounded as he was by his beloved's words, forgot his hurt in sudden, overwhelming indignation.

"Married? You think you may be married?" said Petronilla. "And if you are, who will be your husband? One of your father's slaves, or a swineherd from the village? You could not bear with such a man two moons, so weary you would be of cooking of his porridge and washing of his dishes and cleaning of his dirty hut. No." Her tone became less harsh; she ceased her stirring and turned and smiled at Basilea. "Oh, no! my girl," she said. "That would be foolishness indeed! Why! If you wished you could have a fine house and a litter and many slaves to carry you, and silks from China to dress you in and jewels from the Indian lands to deck your hair. If you would listen to Porcellus——"

And then a very strange thing happened. It should be said that during Petronilla's speech Tamael had been hovering hither and thither about the kitchen. He fluttered in and out among the tables and the stools; he twitched at this thing and at that. Already he was enraged almost beyond toleration, but when the object of the housekeeper's discourse grew clear,

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his fury passed all bounds. Stopping in his flight he seized the saucepan that Petronilla had left upon the fire; and as he did this he prayed (though to what Power he did not know). "O Lord!" he cried. "O Lord! Give me strength to harm this woman!" And behold his hands lifted up the saucepan and moved it freely through the air, so that when Petronilla turned again to stir her mixture, she saw her pot leap up, dance in a curious way above the fire and then dash itself to pieces at her feet.

When Tamael had thrown down the pot he was ashamed. He remembered Marius, the wrestler, and the devil Barshamoth, and the joy these evil creatures had in passionate gesture; and he thought, "I am even as they are," and shuddered. He was mightily afraid, too, lest his violence should have alarmed Basilea; and the pot had scarcely left his hand and Petronilla had scarcely uttered her first scream, when he looked hastily to see if Basilea had observed his action. But she had not, for Petronilla was between her and the fire. She had heard the noise and had run to discover the cause of it, but it was plain she thought the saucepan's fall an accident. "Oh, Petronilla! How rough and careless you can be!" she said, and started to pick up the broken fragments. And a new exultation came upon Tamael; he had not known that he could do these things, and the knowledge pleased him.

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He was glad, also, of the terror he had brought to Petronilla and the stop that he had put to her abominable conversation. For there was no more talk of Caius Porcellus that day. For quite a while the housekeeper could only scream and wring her hands, and even later, when she had recovered sufficient strength to speak, her words were stuttering and incoherent. Basilea was much puzzled by her strange condition.

"Why, what is the matter?" the girl asked, after she had swept and washed the floor and set a new saucepan on the fire. "Why did you scream so for a broken saucepan? Are you so miserly that one lost pot of jam will send you crazy?" But Petronilla was too stupefied, it seemed, to heed the accusation. "It jumped," she said. "It jumped, I saw it;" at which Basilea laughed and said indeed it must have jumped, else it would not have fallen. "No doubt you caught it with your spoon," she said, "or with your dress. You were thinking of other matters at the time," she said, with a touch of malice that was very comforting to Tamael, "and you were punished for your inattention." But Petronilla only repeated in the same foolish tone: "It jumped, I did not touch it. It jumped up of itself." And at this Basilea looked grave, and glanced about her, and crossed herself devoutly. But the alarm soon passed. A moment later she moved her shoulders, dismissing her own fears

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and Petronilla's. "The saucepan fell," she said, "because you pushed it. My father says that you do not know what you are doing when you are excited." And on this occasion Tamael thanked the Lord, Who had mingled with Basilea's gentle temper a grain of obstinacy and of teasing.

And so he forgave himself his evil humor. But Petronilla he did not forgive, and from that hour onward all his new-found powers were devoted to the end that the housekeeper should be annoyed or frightened. For many reasons, some acknowledged and some secret, he dared not harm her too often or too openly, yet there still remained ample opportunities when he could punish her without danger to his own or to Basilea's peace of mind. Petronilla had the habit every day of taking a certain portion of the corn Philondas gave her and concealing it until such time as she could sell it to the village merchants. In this way she had a little hoard of stolen grain. And Tamael in his turn stole the hoard and buried it in a field; and Petronilla was mightily disconcerted. She had the habit also of clipping the edge of all the moneys she received, whether the wages of the slaves or the sums she should have spent on wool or cotton, and of hiding the gold and silver fragments in her mattress. And one night Tamael, having discovered this, went to her chamber and plucked out the money and flung it into the

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garden. He was especially enraged with her on that occasion, for she had been speaking all the day of Porcellus and his wealth and the excellent thing it would be if Basilea could reconcile her father and the merchant. "You evil woman," cried Tamael, leaning over Petronilla's bed. "You thief! You strumpet! You pimp!" No doubt it was by reason of his excessive anger that, when Petronilla presently awoke, the devil appeared to her in his real Hellish guise, black, naked and with outspread wings, so that she screamed and called upon her mother and the saints and made a to-do that roused the entire household.

Thus was Tamael's pride in his grim powers enhanced. Yet he did not repeat his trick. He feared that if he grew too bold, Philondas would no longer laugh at Petronilla's alarms, would cease to tell her, as he did now, that it was her bad conscience made her see devils in the night, and that she would sleep quietly if she did not put rye in the slaves' barley porridge. Tamael was ashamed, also, of his nakedness and of the ugliness that he thought was his. When Basilea, attracted by Petronilla's shrieks, ran into the room, clad only in her little shift and with her eyes softened and clouded by sleep, Tamael was distressed to hear the housekeeper describe her vision as a "filthy monster, all claws and horns and beak—"

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He hated Petronilla for her talk of riches and of Porcellus, and he hated her because her ugliness and greed reminded him of evil things instead of those beauties and those purities that had at first made Philondas' house appear a near approach to Heaven. When she was by he could not but recall the dangers that encompassed his beloved—the merchant's lust, Basilea's new inclination towards wantonness, his own increasing wickedness and the awful mission that had brought him to the house, and whose fullest accomplishment he continued to postpone, promising himself always that to-morrow, or maybe next day, he would begin to tempt Basilea seriously. He did not care to reflect too deeply on these things. His mind was growing ever more confused concerning them, and his heart more troubled; and sometimes he prayed that, in the final hour of temptation, Basilea's piety, the virtues Cyriacus had bred in her sweet spirit, might give her power to withstand his promptings; and sometimes he prayed that she might yield, even though her yielding would bring her to the merchant's bed. For then, her virtue being lost, certain evil desires of his own might find their satisfaction. But again, when this thought pressed him, he would curse the wickedness that had come into his soul, and weep and cry out, "O Lord! Save her! Do not let her sin with Porcellus!" And then again he told himself, "If I

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cannot fulfill my duties, maybe I shall have to leave her." And that was of all prospects the most terrible.

And so he waited, hesitated, trembled. His early happiness, a flower overblown, quivered, ready to fall. He hated Petronilla because, in her ugly presence, he could not enjoy its last lovely petals, so precious and so frail.

And presently, upon a night when he was wandering in the garden and dreaming, as was his custom, of Basilea, he discovered that even these few hours of ease were about to be cut short, and that Petronilla, whom he already hated above every one save Porcellus, was the chief instrument in their curtailing. Tamael was very much disturbed that night. He could not rest for thinking of Basilea in her little shift, and for wondering how he could contrive to stay with her and yet preserve his innocence and hers. His first sense of helplessness had returned to him, that sense of lying in some abominable trap and waiting only to be dragged, close bound yet struggling, to a still crueler fate. And when, in the pale moonlight, he saw Petronilla slip out of the house and go secretly towards a door that gave on to the highroad, and there, opening the door, engage in conversation with a man of moderate stature and heavy, brooding countenance, a man whom he recognized in fact to be Porcellus

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himself, it seemed to Tamael that he could actually feel the tightening of the cords that bound him.

For the merchant and the housekeeper were talking very eagerly. They whispered and they muttered; their heads nodded together like two nuts upon the same stem; and Tamael, guessing that they had talked in this way before and would talk again, knew that it was an ill wind indeed that swayed them.

And the words the devil heard them speak and the plan he heard them concoct that night upon the highroad, to entrap Basilea and convey her to the merchant's house, confirmed the portent. "You shall have her, Master," Petronilla was saying. "Listen, your time is coming." And she proceeded to tell Porcellus that in two days Philondas and his daughter would be journeying to Antioch for the Christian Feasts, which fell, as it happened, on the same days as the festival of the god Adonis, and that nothing would be easier for Porcellus than to take advantage of the crowds and of the wildness and the noise which would be in Antioch on that occasion, to separate the girl from her father and to carry her to his home. "If you are careful," she said, "she need not so much as suspect our plot. She will fancy she is parted from Philondas by chance, and that she is lost, and that you are saving her from the frenzied people. And think, too, how different

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her temper will be once she has seen the grand buildings and the dresses and the gold! It is her first visit to the city; she will be mad to have her share in its delights—she will be mad for the pleasures and the richness you can give her! I tell you—even now she craves for wantonness. But she will not say so. Her heart is secret as a lettuce.” Porcellus was delighted with the plan and with all it promised. “Yes, yes,” he said, “she has no knowledge of wine or elegance or love. I can teach her all these things——” And he passed his tongue over his lips and smiled. And Tamael was so disgusted and so angry and withal so fearful lest Petronilla’s words should be true and the merchant’s hopes well founded, that he jumped from the wall on which he had been sitting and made off down the road. He could not bear to remain longer with these two, who were, in spirit and in truth, his close accomplices.

And as he went along the road, wringing his hands and grinding his teeth and twisting his thoughts this way and that to avoid the lashes of his misery, he made an encounter that threatened at the first shock to give yet another turn to his unhappiness. For there, flying towards him, was the devil Barshamoth, and his face was stern and it was evident that he was come to visit Tamael and to reprove him. But Tamael, after a moment of aston-

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ishment, suffered no particular annoyance. He set his lips and hardened his heart and told himself that he had passed beyond fear of human or devilish wickedness.

When Barshamoth had come up with Tamael he lost no time in greetings or civilities, but entered at once and very briskly into the core of his discourse. "Brother," he said, "I have been sent by our Master Satan to reproach you." And Tamael replied: "I dare say, brother, that you have. The whole world knows I am a fool." And Barshamoth said: "You have been put to tempt the girl Basilea and you have done nothing soever in the matter." And Tamael clenched his fists and glared at Barshamoth and answered: "That is not true. I have brought her to a vain and wanton state of mind in which she sits all day half-naked by her mirror or plays with shepherd lads under the fig-trees. It is not my fault," said Tamael, "that she has not yet sinned with Porcellus. She does not like the man. She says that he is old and ugly." "Then you should have made her sin," said Barshamoth, "with some comelier person. It does not matter to our Lord Satan that she should lose her chastity with this one or with that, so she loses it. Your business is to make her sin. If not with Porcellus—then with another man." And at this Tamael was much astonished and also much relieved. It was as though a window had opened

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unexpectedly upon the cell in which he lay confined; the prospect was changed, the air freshened. He ceased his angry answers and took Barshamoth by the hand and drew him down into the shadow of a tree. "I see," he said, "that I am indeed a silly, ignorant fellow. Pray instruct me further, dear Barshamoth, in these matters."

And so the two devils sat beneath the tree and talked together. And Barshamoth scolded Tamael, saying that he was plainly of the class of fools who see no farther than the outward aspect of the law and take the letter for the spirit. "It might almost be supposed," he said, "that sinning is not to your taste, so little do you bring your mind to bear upon it." And he told him again that Satan cared not for the means whereby a soul was caught, but only for the end, namely the catching. "But the Sorcerer," protested Tamael. "Can I then cheat the Sorcerer?" And Barshamoth pursed his lips and frowned and answered a trifle testily that yes, in a manner, Tamael could do that. "A devil can cheat any man," he said, "if the cheating is to the greater glory of the Lord Satan. For human desires are of no consequence to our Master save as tools in the accomplishment of his mighty wishes. Sorcerers and magicians are but the instruments of his will, and their spells are successful only in so far as they interpret his spirit, which is the spirit of pure evil and has

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naught to do with worldly things. And so it is that unless a man pursue evil for evil's sake and not in hope of gold or luxury or any human gain, he cannot be a great magician. And so it is also that you, Tamael, are bound by the spirit of the spell, which is the spirit of our Lord Satan and desires that the girl Basilea should be led into temptation, yet you are not bound by its human objects, which are temporal matters and of no real importance."

Thus spoke the devil Barshamoth, and Tamael, hearing him, thought, "It is well said that Satan is the father of sophistries and lies." But he made no answer, for already Barshamoth had resumed his speech and was reproving Tamael for his laziness; whereupon Tamael sought to excuse himself and to lay the blame of his slow progress upon Cyriacus and the holy influence he spread about the girl. And Barshamoth scolded him again, saying that the Lord Jehovah's love of Basilea and His care of her were the more reasons for Tamael to work hard. "It is true," he said, "that a devil can do no better than his best. But you, Tamael, have done too little. I warn you," he added, "that if you do not soon proceed with this affair, our Master will send another messenger to your Basilea. Maybe I shall come myself. I hear she is a dainty morsel." And Tamael was so frightened at the threat that he began to cry out and to protest and to give the most fervent prom-

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ises of future diligence. In his extremity he even, for the first time, told a lie, and pretended that he and not Petronilla had devised the plan for carrying Basilea to the merchant's house. When he had informed Barshamoth of the plot, and how Basilea would be set among silks and flowers, intoxicated with music, stupefied with wine—"Surely, surely," he cried (and now indeed he spoke his truest fear), "surely she will lose her virtue then?" And with this Barshamoth seemed better pleased. He rose and prepared to leave Tamael. Just before going, however, he turned and spoke again. "If you cannot make her sin with Porcellus," he said, "why do you not try to sin with her yourself?" "Myself?" exclaimed Tamael. "With my black body and ugly face?" Barshamoth looked at Tamael and gave a little laugh and rubbed his nose. "You can take a man's shape if you choose," he said. "For a devil you have a somewhat foolish air, but you would make a pretty man." And with that he departed. And Tamael remained sitting by the roadside, and the blackness of the shadows and the brightness of the moon were on him, and his thoughts were dark yet splashed with light even as the earth itself.

CHAPTER VII

*I*N that hour the confusion that had come into Tamael's heart was lightened, and he looked more clearly upon the world that Providence and his own thoughts had made him. And although in the main it still appeared a dark, perplexing world, a world wherein nothing was defined, nothing completed, he liked it better than before; Barshamoth's words had cast a faint radiance upon it, haggard and sickly as the moonlight on the darkened valley, yet gladdening, nevertheless, to eyes that had expected only blackness. And now Tamael saw that the evil which was his destiny wore two faces, one somewhat less ugly than the other, and he saw too that whereas he had imagined himself altogether bound, he was, in fact, free to choose between these two forms of evil. And he chose the less ugly and was grateful. "Even I," he thought, "cannot be so foul a creature as the merchant Porcellus." And he put away his doubts and fears and hesitations, his half-hopes and secret tremblings, and fell to planning how he could best and most opportunely assume a man's shape and learn to tempt Basilea in his own person.

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He did not do so at once, however. When morning came, he found that Basilea and her father and all the household were busy preparing for their visit to Antioch. Philondas was occupied putting his accounts to rights and ordering the work that must be done during his absence; Basilea and Petronilla were baking the meats and eggs and little cakes that would be eaten at the feast. After this, Basilea went to her chamber and spent the remainder of the day in prayer; and despite his most earnest endeavors, Tamael could never bring himself to intrude upon such pious practices.

It should be said, too, that Tamael was still uncertain of his devilish powers. He was not yet proficient in the work of incarnation. In the early morning of that day he had indeed tried to take a human form. Alone by the pool's side he had said the words and made the signs he thought were needed; but when, having completed his operations, he turned to examine the result, he was annoyed to find that he had hair upon his face and pointed ears upon his head—in fact that he had become a dog and not a man. His second attempt was scarcely more fortunate, for this time in place of skin and hair he saw feathers and a horny nose and short, brown wings. Thus disguised he had flown to Basilea's window and had perched there for a while, gazing fondly on his beloved where she slept. But

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to become a bird or a dog was not enough; and as he continued to labor at his work, Tamael was angry with himself and railed at the idleness and folly that had kept him, when he was in Hell, from studying his devilish duties carefully.

But on the following morning, which was the morning of Basilea's journey to Antioch, his efforts were successful, and Tamael, bending over the water, beheld at last a man's face, white of skin, dark of eye and gentle of expression. It was, in truth, the face he knew, his own familiar devil's countenance; yet its pallor, the absence of wings behind it, the presence of a short, white linen robe beneath it, made it a very agreeable sight. These were the features, he reflected, these the limbs that Basilea would presently behold. But at that moment he did not dwell upon the thought or upon the circumstances it suggested. Nor did he stop to wonder if Barshamoth's judgment on his face were true. He was determined, before considering any other thing, to defeat, if he could, Petronilla's abominable plot and to rescue his beloved from the merchant Porcellus.

And so, quickly resuming his customary invisible shape, he flew to join Basilea and her father. They were already on the road, and with them went the good man Cyriacus and Petronilla the housekeeper and a little ass that carried all their burdens. And

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Tamael walked behind, though not so far behind tht he could not watch Basilea's face or hear the conversation with which the saintly Cyriacus beguiled the way.

The day was hot. In the woods the narcissus and the lily made a rich scent. In the fields the corn grew thick, and ever and anon Tamael felt waves of warm air that flowed from it and waves of cooler air, as though he walked in alternate pools of shallow and deep water. And Cyriacus, too, observed these things and spoke of them to Philondas, bidding him mark the bright sunshine and the pleasant airs and the corn and the red poppies in it. "Behold, the earth is born again," he said, "after the barrenness of winter. And behold the Lord Jesus, Who was dead, is risen and stands in Glory. Hallelujah! For we also shall be refashioned and made new. We are born, as it were, dead, like lion-cubs. Yet even as the cub is brought to life at the lion's roar, so shall we rise and live at the call of the Lord Jesus." And hearing him Philondas nodded, and Basilea smiled very happily, and Petronilla pinched her lips according to her custom.

And presently, after they had crossed a certain pass, they met a number of men, holy pilgrims that were come over the mountains from Cæsarea and were going to Antioch or to Jerusalem or across the sands to distant Babylonia. Some of them were mild

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and kindly-looking like Cyriacus, and some of them were stern, even fierce-seeming men, who strode along like soldiers marching, and bore their staffs as spears are borne, and stared before them boldly, as though their enemies might well be just ahead but they did not mind that a tittle. Others were neither fierce nor meek, but brooding and watchful; and others again had a strange gayety that shone in their eyes like fire; they looked upon the world yet did not see it; their feet trod the earth heedlessly, as if no earth were there.

And three of these men joined themselves to Cyriacus and Philondas; and they all walked on together, talking of the feast towards which they traveled and of other pious matters. And at last they came to Antioch, its marble palaces and temples, its fine, colonnaded highways, its pavements of white and many-colored stone. At that hour the city had an unhappy and an agitated look, for it was the first hour of the funeral ceremonies of the god Adonis, and in it the people made mourning for the young god's death and for the sorrows of his lady Aphrodite. The houses and the stalls that stood before the houses were hung with wreaths of bay and oak and yew; and vast crowds moved through the streets, all going in sober yet in hurried, eager fashion, to behold the funeral procession of the god, the company of weeping women who

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bore his corpse to burial. The air was uneasy with the hum of whispering voices and of shuffling feet, and heavy with the heat and with the smell of incense and of dust and the strong, melancholy smell of leaves.

Everything was hushed, everything saddened. And in this unwonted quiet, Philondas and his companions ceased their arguments and proceeded very discreetly; and Basilea began to look about her in surprise; and Tamael began to look about him anxiously, for now his mind was wholly set upon the plot that Porcellus had made to seize and carry off Basilea, and he feared the crowds and the festival towards which they hastened, and the wildness that Petronilla had said would fall upon them and which would provide the merchant with his villainous opportunities.

He did not like the people, the contrast of their gayly colored robes and darkened temper; he did not like the carriages, the horses, the silken and befeathered litters that hurried by from time to time; he did not like the sense that was abroad of strain and secret agitation; and especially he did not like the interest that all these things awakened in Basilea. As the travelers and the multitudes surrounding them advanced into the city, they walked more slowly, and often they altogether stopped, to allow the passage of some group of horsemen or to give

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room to some patrician's chariot. On one of these occasions it was an unusually handsome coach caused them to halt, and Tamael was distressed to see that Basilea glanced curiously at the elegant young men who lay therein. Such youths, Tamael thought, were surely of the silly, womanish sort for which Antioch was famous. One played idly with a string of agate beads. Two others rubbed their nails against their palms and held them up to see the polish. Only the fourth appeared in a measure serious; he sat less lazily than his companions and wrote in an absorbed and earnest manner on his tablets. Yet he found no favor in Tamael's eyes, for Basilea had glanced at him with interest and curiosity. Tamael was glad when, the coach being past and the travelers continuing upon their way, Philondas called his daughter to his side and bade her draw her veil more tightly about her hair. "This is a time," he reminded her, "when every mischief threatens. The harlot Aphrodite has lost her lover and the people go to see him buried. They pretend and make a show of sorrow. Yet in fact they are full of wickedness and venery. After the funeral every man and woman of them will be playing at Adonis and Astarte in the streets of Antioch." And Cyriacus said: "To-day they mourn because their god is dead. Soon they will rejoice because he lives again. Even as we do."

But no one heeded the remark. Tamael himself,

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although he heard it well, was too absorbed in his own thoughts to seek to understand its meaning. The sight of the young men and Philondas' talk of wickedness and venery had added another terror to his considerable alarms. "For," thought he, "even if I succeed in keeping Basilea from Porcellus, can I be sure she will not catch the notice of one of these licentious boys and be lured by him to her destruction?" This fear was increased by every peep he took at his beloved. He had supposed that with her white linen veil drawn close, hiding her hair and half her cheeks, her beauty would be less remarkable. But in fact the change had given to her face a new, strange sadness that was infinitely disturbing. "How," he sighed, "can any man resist her?" He looked about him more sharply, more anxiously than before, scanning the streets for elegant youths, excited people, Porcellus, and the first signs of the amorous and unhappy ceremonies of Adonis.

And presently, as the travelers reached the greatest of the great highways, Tamael discovered all the objects of his fears, save one, which was Porcellus. In this place was a yet denser multitude and a yet deeper sense of agitation, for in this place the funeral procession would soon pass by, and already a vast number of the people were assembled and waited to behold the spectacle. Those that were rich had left their litters and their carriages and had gone

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inside the houses; and those that were poor but bold had climbed upon the outside of the houses and perched upon the bases of the columns and on the capitals and on every available ledge and corner. But the greater mass was in the highroad itself, lining the pavements as far as eye could see and forming so compact a barrier that no man could have thrust himself through it. And so it happened that when Philondas and his companions came to the end of a certain lesser street that led into the highroad, they found their way altogether stopped, and were forced to stand and to await the passage of the procession. And beside them, by a singular mischance as Tamael thought, were the four young men who had been driving in the handsome coach. Like their wealthy fellows they had sought, no doubt, to reach their seats within the houses. But the crowd had caught and held them, and now they stood also in the anxious, excited multitude, and so near the travelers that the scent of their clothes and of the flowers that they wore drowned every other scent, and the words they spoke were clearly audible above the rustlings and the murmurings of the people.

Tamael was much discomfited. Was it not enough, he thought, that his lady should be in such a posture—threatened maybe, with mortal danger, exposed, in every case, to the contacts of a vulgar mob,

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compelled to see its profane looks, to hear its speech, to feel, perhaps to share, the fever and the melancholy of its peculiar temper? The travelers had scarcely halted when the crowd set up a dismal moaning cry that made Basilea catch her breath and drew Tamael still closer to his beloved. At first the sound was but a single groan, uttered by some man or woman in the highway. But directly it was heard, another answered it and then another and another and another, until along the whole of the great road, there ran a noise like the slow breaking of waves. Then everything again fell silent. "They are coming," said the graver of the four young men. "Holy Aphrodite and her lover. All passion and all suffering." And Philondas said, "Do not forget, Basilea, to lower your eyes when the procession goes by. There is no need for a Christian maiden to behold such things." And Basilea said, "Yes, father." But Tamael saw that she was full of curiosity and excitement and half pleasurable, half painful anticipation. It was no longer a trick of white linen or concealed hair that gave her face its look of wonder and of sadness.

She was stirred by the crowd's odd behavior, by the words the young man had spoken, by the feeling of suspense that lay as heavily upon the air as the smell of incense and of funeral garlands. Yet as Tamael gazed anxiously from her to the four youths,

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one at least of his alarms was quieted. For although Basilea was plainly concerned with the young men and with their comments, they in their turn gave no thought to the presence of Basilea. They stood, sniffing at the small green oranges they carried, and peered over the heads of the folk before them; their ears, their minds were wholly attentive to the distant sound of music and of wailing voices that followed the crowd's unhappy cry and marked the approach of the procession. Said the gravest of them: "Cytherea weeps. Divine Astarte, mother and lover of gods and men, bewails her loss. It is all womanhood weeping for its love." And one of his companions said: "Why do you speak only of women, Lucius? Do not men love?" Whereupon a third—one of those who set such store by the high polish of their nails—laughed a tittering laugh. "Yes, truly," he said. "Dear Lucius forgets our Cyprian Aphrodite, she who is so manly despite her female dress!" Which frivolous remark checked, for that moment, the current of the grave young man's fervor. He frowned and said severely: "Hush, fool. Do not mock our Mother Venus. If you offend her she will put a curse upon you so that you see all women in one woman's face and never know the joys of change and of variety. Or worse still! She will cause you to love one woman and never to discover her although you kiss a thousand." "There is no

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chance of that," said the other, and laughed his tittering laugh. And his particular friend, the last of the four youths, laughed with him.

Meanwhile, the noise of music and of voices had become clearer. The sobbing of the drums was heard, and the wailing of the mourners, and the groans, swelling greater as the procession advanced, of the assembled multitude. And above these sounds there came the shrill, continuous piping of the flutes, a note so thin, so painful, that even Tamael, in the midst of his preoccupations, felt it like a blade thrust in his bosom. Lucius, the grave youth, spoke again. "Cytherea mourns," he said. "She tears her hair and beats her breast. She has grown ugly, for Adonis the beautiful has gone from her to Acheron, to the dark caresses of Persephone. In her divine flesh she suffers all the cruelties of love—jealousy that quickens appetite and murders trust, and faithlessness discovered, turning remembered joys to torment, and tender dreams that mock at present bitterness, and loss that wakens in the night and calls and calls— In her divine spirit also is she wounded. And this is a great mystery, for behold the whole of life is wounded with her! The Mystic Two that strove ever to be One are parted and can strive no more, so that the will of God is wried and the world halts on its way to Eternity." The young man paused, and as though in answer to his plaint, the people who were before

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him in the highway gave forth a loud and very piteous moan. "Cease your litanies, my Lucius," said one of the more frivolous young men. "Your voice is wearisome as the rattling of beans within a box. Let us look upon Adonis."

As he spoke he leaned eagerly forward, and his three friends leaned forward also. And Tamael, between apprehension and excitement, put his arm about Basilea's waist. For now the procession was come near to where the travelers stood, and the sight of it and the tumult that it made and the lamentations it provoked among the people moved Tamael so deeply that his last fear of sin was forgotten and he no longer cared what influence his unseen presence might have on his beloved. Now he beheld the whole array of doleful women—the musicians and the priestesses, and those that scattered incense right and left, and those that carried trays and baskets full of fruit and flowers and cakes shaped in the form of men and animals, and those that bore, in a fine ebony coffin, the effigy of the dead god. Now he could hear the words the mourners said as they tore their hair and their black robes and plucked at their naked breasts. "Adonis!" they moaned. "Adonis the beautiful is dead, is dead!" To which the folk who were beside the travelers made answer. "Adonis! Adonis!" cried a woman in the forefront of the crowd; and "Adonis!"

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cried another. "Gracious, comely, darling Adonis!" While a third, leaping from the ground and flinging up her arms, shrieked suddenly, "Adonis! Adonis! My lover! My son!" and fell into a passion of weeping.

And still the procession advanced; the blood poured from the breasts and shoulders of the priestesses; the shrill music beat upon the air. And still the voices of the mourners rose and sank and rose again. "He is dead, Adonis!" they cried; and then on a lower note: "Adonis! Adonis!" And once more: "He is dead, Adonis!" until it seemed to Tamael that he too was lifted up, swung down and lifted up again; that his heart, his senses, that his very spirit was aswim upon those waves of ecstasy and wretchedness. In his ears were the clamors of the women, in his mind the echoes of the words, but dimly understood, that Lucius had spoken. Basilea lay in his arms. And feeling her tremble, seeing her look with wondering eyes upon the effigy of the young god, serene, smiling and most unusually fair, Tamael scarcely knew whether his own trembling came from the desire to embrace her yet more closely, or from his terror lest she should escape.



BOOK III



CHAPTER VIII

*I*T was at that moment that the event happened which Tamael had most gravely feared. The tumult and the agitation were at their height. The procession had nearly passed, and on every side the people were leaping from their places and running to join the train of worshipers that followed after it. And as they went they cried and beat their breasts; and their brethren, those that remained beside the houses or in the opening of the lesser street where Philondas and his companions stood, cried and beat their breasts likewise. And so it was that while the crowd had become less dense and the way freer, there was a considerable commotion all about the travelers, an increased uproar and a new swaying and heaving and jostling of bodies hither and thither. Already one group of men had rushed upon the travelers from behind, giving the three pilgrims so violent a push that they stumbled and nearly fell; already Philondas had exclaimed in indignation and alarm, and already Cyriacus had caught at Basilea's arm to steady her, when a second group of men, dressed like priests with long

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white robes and shaven heads, came running on the heels of the first, and thrusting Philondas to one side and Cyriacus to the other, carried Basilea off into the highway.

Tamael, shocked, angry and extremely mortified, sprang after them. "I am a fool," he cried. "I am deaf, blind, insensible and altogether witless!" He was certain that the men who had thus torn his lady from him were the slaves of the merchant Porcellus; and in his fury, he spread his wings and jumped into the air, intending to snatch Basilea from her captors and to fly back with her, invisible though he was, to Philondas. But even as he turned to do this thing, a thought struck him and he stopped. "If I seize her and bear her away while I am still unseen," thought he, "the people will be astonished. They will know I am a devil. They will cry out and make a scandal. And Basilea, too, will be afraid." And reflecting in this wise, he resolved to bide his time and, at the first favorable opportunity, to attempt the more difficult and dangerous task, which was to shed his devil's shape and rescue his beloved in a human incarnation. "I shall be but one," he told himself, "against many. But Basilea will surely be more grateful to a man than to a miracle?"

And so, containing his anger, he flew on after the seeming priests and their lovely victim. In their

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first swift flight the men had carried Basilea far down the highroad; and as they thrust their way through the lamenting multitude, they also called loudly on the names of Aphrodite and Adonis, while those who were not holding Basilea leaped up and down and tossed their arms above their heads. So it happened that their imposture and their rape were not discovered; Basilea's cries remained unheard, her struggles unheeded, and she was brought without hindrance to the smaller, quieter street where, as Tamael at once observed, the stage had been ingeniously set for her reception. For here were but few people, few coaches and few carriages, yet here, by what appeared a singular chance, was the merchant Porcellus, riding, alone save for one boy slave, in his silken litter. He was passing, it seemed, all unconcernedly by, but directly he caught sight of Basilea and heard her screams, he stopped his runners and leaped forth with every appearance of surprise and indignation, and throwing himself upon the girl's aggressors, put them to flight as speedily, Tamael thought, as he could have done had he been a man and his enemies paid not to oppose him.

Basilea, meanwhile, lay in the arms of the boy slave. Her eyes were closed, her cheeks pale. She had swooned, and so profound was her insensibility that it was not until Porcellus had borne

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her away into his litter and on through the hot and noisy streets to his house, that she began to stir and sigh a little. And even then she remained very much confused. "Adonis," she whispered. "Comely, gracious, darling Adonis." And hearing her, Porcellus smiled as though well satisfied; and Tamael was astonished. Yet he also, because of a notion that had lately come into his mind, was not displeased at her exclamation. "I shall be a young man," he thought.

Inside the house everything was shadowed, quiet, cool as in some deep-sunk secret well. In the chamber to which Porcellus brought Basilea, the walls shone as though newly wet, and from the opening that was at the end of the chamber came a noise of splashing fountains. This freshness, like a mantle of smooth waters, fell upon Basilea and restored her. She opened her eyes, and seeing the merchant's face close to her own—though not too close, for he was pretending, as Tamael saw, to friendliness and true concern—she gave a start of fear and of amazement. "Was it you," she said, "was it you, Porcellus Galla, who saved me?"

The merchant bent over her very solicitously. In one hand he held a phial of sweet vinegar to revive her, in the other a cup of wine. He had laid her down upon a couch, and his slaves were busy with basins and towels and perfumed lotions washing

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her face and hands and feet. "Yes, lovely Basilea," he said, "but do not be afraid. Drink this. When you are recovered we will talk freely." And he gave her the wine, and she drank it; and whether, as Tamael feared, from its heartening effects or because the merchant's friendly tone had calmed her or because, in truth, she had no real suspicion of him, the first sharpness of alarm passed from her face. "What a strange thing," she said, "I had almost fancied— But where have you brought me, Porcellus? What is this house? Where is my father?"

The merchant set down the phial and the empty cup, and hastened to reassure her. "This is my house," he said. "And I swear to you, divine Basilea, by my patroness, the chaste and lovely Artemis herself—praise be to her who has preserved your purity!—that you are as safe in it as in your own home! As for your father—I have done what I could to help him. I have sent slaves to every likely quarter of the town to find him and bring him hither. But in every case you need have no fear. If he does not come here in a little while, I myself will conduct you to your Christian hostelry. I trust," he added, "that you will pass this short time with me in peace and friendliness? I trust you do not hate me so that my very house displeases you?"

His air was still all reverence; his tone, as he

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strove thus lyingly to soothe Basilea, was still all kindness and solicitude. And it seemed, at the conclusion of his speech, that the girl was indeed comforted. At a sign from Porcellus the slaves had left the couch, and others had appeared, carrying dishes of meat and fruit and cakes for Basilea's further refreshment. And while the slaves ran to and fro through the great, shadowy chamber, Basilea looked curiously at them and at the marbles, the pillars, the carved and painted figures on the walls about her, at the white columns that stood in the opening of the chamber, at the green trees beyond. "No," she said at last, "it is pleasant here. And I am glad to rest awhile."

She was bewildered, shaken, weakened by excess of feeling. But she was no longer frightened. And Porcellus saw this and again smiled secretly. Forsaking his solemn air, he sat down beside her on the cushions; and Tamael fell to considering with himself what he must do when presently the meal the slaves were making ready had been served and Basilea and Porcellus remained alone together. Not far from the couch and from the table which the slaves had set before it, was a large recess or smaller chamber, half-hidden by a curtain. Peeping in, Tamael found that it contained a bed, a stool, a fine bronze mirror and, in a niche upon the wall, the statue of a goat-legged demon—a short, thick

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figure, gross of expression and obscene of posture. But Tamael was more concerned at that moment with the room itself than with its contents. "When I wish to make myself a man," he thought, "this place will suit me well." And he flew quickly back to Basilea.

The slaves had finished setting out the food. A dish of spiced meat was on the table and a dish of pastries; and at the sight, or maybe at the smell of them, Basilea roused herself and smiled. "That has a pleasing look," she said. "I did not know that I was hungry." "Hunger is usual after strong emotion," said the merchant. "I pray you, do not stint yourself. I hate to see your pretty cheeks so pale." With his own hands he helped her to the hot, peppery food, and together they began to eat. But although they lay thus amicably side by side, he did not, as Tamael had expected, lean over Basilea or attempt to touch her while she ate. Only his glance went furtively about her body. And in much the same fashion, the words he spoke were not bold words, declaring all his thought, but insinuations, hints, as though his mind crept softly about hers, seeking to caress and hold it.

"I am happy," he said, "that you do not dislike my house. There are a thousand objects in it that I would like to show you—stones and metals curiously wrought and embroidered silks and pictures

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and rare carvings—objects that were made to be admired by sensitive, fine spirits such as yours. Often I have asked Philondas to bring you here that you might see these things and I might enjoy the sight of your slim fingers handling them. But Philondas is a stern man. I fear also that he does not understand your delicate nature.”

Basilea drank her second cup of wine. She was now restored, Tamael saw, and quite at ease. Her cheeks were flushed, her eyes brightened. There was even a suggestion in her look of the mischief that young Hylas was wont to waken there. “I think it is,” she said, “that my father does not trust you.” But Porcellus made no answer to her teasing. “That is not kind in him,” he said. “I have done nothing to deserve mistrust. Our quarrel came about through a mistake, a misapprehension of his own. But let us leave your father,” he went on, “and speak of you. You are so lovely in body and so sensitive in mind. Yet you are so young—I doubt if you know all the fair things that are in you. You must let me tell you of them, sweet Basilea, and teach you to display and to increase them. For no woman can enjoy her beauties and the power and the pleasures they can give her, until she understands them truly. I have always said that a woman and her loveliness are like the lute-player and the lute. If she would get music for her own and the world’s de-

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light, she must first learn to know herself and all the subtleties of her nature."

Thus cunningly did Porcellus seek to entangle and to hold Basilea. The gift he offered her, Tamael knew, was one that her vanity loved well, a mirror wherein to preen itself. And Tamael's heart grew thin with fear. He turned and went into the recess. For the moment was at hand when he must needs make ready to become a man; the slaves were gone from the great chamber; the merchant had moved nearer to Basilea. "Yet what can I do," Tamael thought, "if she yields to the vile fellow's flatteries? Can I save her by force?"

Basilea, made bold by wine and her youth's arrogance, smiled at Porcellus. "I do not think," she said, "that I know myself so ill as you say. Of my face I know the sun has made it like the country-maid's in King Solomon's story. And of my mind I know that it is willful and not to be turned from its thoughts by other folk's! Yet I should be glad to improve both, Porcellus, if you will teach me. What should I do? Bathe myself in asses' milk or learn philosophy?" "You must take a lover," said the merchant. "That is of first importance, for nothing increases a woman's beauty like caresses." He paused and for the first time looked straight at Basilea. "But I am sure," he said, "that you have considered that already?" And Basilea answered:

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"Sometimes, Porcellus. Even to-day when I looked on the image of your pagan Adonis, I thought that maybe such a fair, smooth-cheeked youth would be a sweet companion. In truth I liked him so well that I almost fancied I was swooning in his arms. But I awoke and saw your face." And she laughed. And Tamael, behind his curtain, was comforted with a new comfort and warmed with a new warmth.

While she still mocked him—her head thrown back, her lips quivering, the devil thought, most temptingly—Porcellus, in no wise disconcerted, spoke again. "Divine Basilea," he said, "it is right and proper that you should dream of young men. Their beauty calls to yours. But you should not dream of them only. Commonly they are poor and can give but kisses. And always they are thoughtless and selfish in gifts and love. If you desire boys you should have an older man besides, to guide and protect you. You should have a lover who would be generous and foreseeing and who would care for your delight so far above his own that he would not be jealous." Basilea's laughter ceased. "Can you mean," she said, "that there are men who would allow the woman they desired to kiss other men?" And Porcellus answered: "Most certainly, divine Basilea. Are there no joys save in fleshly self-seeking? The vulgar endure cuckoldom

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with wretchedness or anger. But the true artist, the aristocrat in love, thinks only of his lady's pleasure. If she feels pain, then he must feel pain also and seek a remedy for it. But if it is her wish whether to eat of some delicious food or to enjoy sweet music or the caresses of a handsome lover, then is he happy in her happiness."

The merchant's tone had changed. Little by little it had lost its first friendly quality, had grown more intimate, more pressing. Plainly he was resolved to put aside his persuasions and his pretenses, for, as he ceased speaking, he leaned yet nearer to Basilea and stared boldly into her face. And now all things in the chamber were transformed in a like manner, as though they, too, conspired to close about Basilea and to overwhelm her. Night was falling; the shadows were become heavy; the quiet was turned to silence. It seemed that the whole air and spirit of the place, which had been still and restful, was quickened with the same slow purpose that sounded in the merchant's voice and moved in his thick body.

And Tamael began hurriedly to make his incantations. Basilea, secure in her arrogance and still somewhat bemused with wine, lay all unconscious of approaching evil; and Porcellus bent over her, his white robe so near to hers that in the dimness they appeared but as one figure. Suddenly he took

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her hands. "I would be just such a lover as you need," he said. "Kiss me, Basilea." And the girl, violently alarmed, writhed and screamed out. "No, no," she cried, "I do not want you." But she could not thrust him from her; his arm was clasped about her waist and the weight of his big limbs was on her. And Tamael, during that last moment of his work, heard only Basilea's gasps and cries and the merchant's breathing and the noise of bodies striving desperately together. Then he, being changed into a man, seized the statue of the goat-legged god and leaped from behind the curtain and smote Porcellus so well-aimed and true a blow upon the temple that he rolled to the ground, instantly and without a cry.

Tamael turned to Basilea. As the merchant fell she had again screamed out, in terror of the blow and of the unknown youth who had thus startlingly dealt it; now she lay cowering among the cushions, too astounded, it seemed, to do aught save gaze at her deliverer. But Tamael took her and drew her gently to her feet. "We must go quickly," he said, "or the slaves will discover us." And she allowed him to lead her towards the chamber's opening; and although her eyes were full of consternation, and the fingers that held the torn bosom of her gown trembled, she did not appear afraid. So they went, in silence yet very rapidly, across the

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courtyard and the garden and out through a side-door into the street.

When they had gone some little way from the merchant's house they stopped and drew breath and looked at one another. And Tamael let his hand fall from Basilea's arm, and having done so, sighed; his strength and pride went from him with her touch and it seemed he was no longer her deliverer, she no longer the tender, trembling thing that he had saved. They stood in the half-lit, quiet street; above their heads hung dim masses of leaves and branches, spreading from invisible gardens; there was a smell of flowers but no flowers could be seen; and Basilea was as mysterious to Tamael as the darkened street and the trees and the perfume.

Basilea spoke. "Will you not tell me who you are," she asked, "and how you came to be in Porcellus' house?" And Tamael answered quickly, for the lies he had prepared and now sought to tell were like sharp pebbles in his path and he was eager to be over them. "I am called Tamael," he said. "I am a traveler—a stranger to Antioch. I saw you in the highway—there with the old men beside you and the young men in front, when Adonis, the pagan god, was carried by. You did not see me but I was close to you all that time. I saw you taken

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by the priests and followed you to save you. But I was not quick enough. And I saw you taken by Porcellus, and because I know him and his wickedness I did not trust him. I was afraid that he would do you mischief. So I went to his house and asked for him, and when the slaves would not let me pass, I found a secret way into his chamber. I would have struck him sooner if I had been sure you wished it." And Basilea said: "I hate him. I wish that I could wash myself and all my clothes where he has touched me." She frowned and drew her shoulders together like one who suffers chill. Then she glanced at Tamael. "So you were near me when the god Adonis passed?" she said. And Tamael said, "Yes, Basilea." And both were silent for a space and stared fixedly at the ground.

Presently Basilea, still staring downward, spoke again. "I must thank you," she said, "for your concern and for your boldness. My father, too, will thank you." She raised her head, and behold the warmth that had touched Tamael, light as the moths that flew hither and thither in the darkness, fluttered on his cheek and was gone. "Shall we go to him now?" said Basilea. "He will be glad to welcome you and to take you, if you wish, to our holy ceremonies and afterwards to our feast. For I think you are a Christian?" she finished, questioning him. "Or are you a Jew?" And Tamael flushed, this time

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with another warmth. It was as though a harsh wind laden with desert sands had blown upon the soft, sweet-smelling night. Its dryness hardened his lips, parched his throat as he replied that yes, he was a Christian, yes, he would take her to her father. "But I cannot attend the ceremonies," he said. "You must not ask that of me, Basilea." And his tone was so constrained and so vehement that Basilea was astonished. "Why not," she asked, "since you are a Christian?" But Tamael did not answer. She turned from him with a little gesture. "No doubt you have some other more urgent business," she said, "so let us go, each to our own place." And they started to walk through the warm night that had enveloped Tamael and his beloved with such tenderness and was now dry, painful, burning as the desert sands.

It was his impiety, Tamael thought, that had made her turn from him, had brought the coldness to her voice, the impatience to her gesture. And the picture that he formed of her mind, of the contempt, perhaps the hatred, she must feel for one who thus forswore the holy mysteries, was so intolerable that presently he found courage to speak. "You must not think," he said, "that I do not want to go with you to worship. Indeed I am willing. But I dare not." In his turn he looked away. They were passing by a very pleasant open space

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where there were trees and flowers and fountains. Here and there lanterns shed little pools of brightness on the leaves, giving them an unnatural, painted look. But for the most part the place was lit only by the yellow half-moon which was now risen; and in this pale light men and women walked, close-locked together, or lay, more closely still, beneath the trees.

Tamael saw nothing of these things. "I cannot go with you to pray," he said, "because I am a great sinner." "A sinner?" said Basilea; but Tamael was intent on his own thoughts and did not heed the gentleness that had come again into her voice. "Yes," he repeated, "a great sinner. And if you would be kind to me, you will not speak of such matters—neither of my sin nor of your father's virtue, nor yet of the holy feastings that I may not visit. To-night, while you pray to the Lord, I, alas, must be alone." He paused, waiting for some sign of blame or condemnation, and so certain that he would receive it that already he hung his head. But Basilea did not speak, and he resumed more hopefully: "But to-morrow, maybe, you will let me see you?" "To-morrow," said Basilea, "we will return home." "Yet," said Tamael, "if my person does not offend you, I could follow you and see you there?" And Basilea said, "I would be happy if we could meet again."

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And once more the night was warm and soft and tender, enfolding Tamael and his beloved. Once more he saw the flowers and the trees, and breathed the sweet-smelling air. The moonlight, falling on Basilea, made a strange shining in her eyes so that their darkness seemed to swim in some unknown pearly substance, lustrous and intangible as light itself. Tamael longed to take her face between his hands and look and look at this mysterious shining.

Basilea's step fell quietly beside his own. "I did not know," she said, "that cities could be so fresh and peaceful." And Tamael said: "It is as though there were no city—only shadows and cool air." And Basilea said: "How pleasantly the trees smell!" And Tamael said: "Everything is pleasant here." And Basilea said: "Near my father's house there is a wood where I sit sometimes. I think it is the fairest place in all the world." And Tamael said: "I have thought that gold and marble and fine stones were beautiful. Yet I like trees and meadows better." And he thought: "She does not hate me, although I told her I had sinned."

Talking in this way they left the open space and came into the blacker shadows and sharpened moonlight of the streets. And here again the peacefulness that had fallen upon Tamael was broken. The tall buildings did not trouble him, nor the people that hastened by from time to time, hurrying along be-

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side the houses or crossing swiftly from shadow to shadow, now here, now gone, like insects seeking refuge. He walked as in a trance; there was no reality save in Basilea's face and voice and in the touch of her arm against his. But presently Basilea said: "Do you know where we are going, for I do not?" And Tamael wakened from his dream. "No," he said, "I am altogether a stranger here," and saw himself a fool again, unfit for the robe of pride that Basilea's kindness had restored to him. But Basilea was not dismayed. "We have been foolish," she said, and smiled at him. "Maybe we have gone all this way in vain! We must discover the greatest of the bridges. I know our hostelry is there." So they turned aside into a street that was somewhat less empty than the last—for hitherto they had chosen, by a common impulse as it seemed, the darkest, quietest ways—and inquired of a passer-by how they might reach the river. And the man told them, and their minds were set at rest. Yet, because the man stared at the rent in Basilea's gown and wished her good night with a coarse laugh and a lewd word concerning the doings of lovers by the riverside, Tamael was abashed. They walked on in silence, and it was not until they were near the end of their journey that he recovered sufficiently even to glance at his beloved.

And now the time was come to say farewell. By

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the river the air was cooler; the waters had a silky, caressing look. But the freshness and the quiet did not soothe Tamael's agitation. He was still held by the lewd words the passer-by had spoken, and the fear that their coarseness had in some manner blackened him in his Basilea's mind. And the thought of leaving her, the thought that, save in his first masterful grasp, he had not so much as touched her hand, added to his fever. "This must be the house," Basilea said. "My father has often spoken of it to me." She stopped before a small, whitewashed building. Upon its walls were rude images of men with donkeys' heads, drawn by pagan hands in mockery of the God who rode upon an ass. "Will you not come in with me," said Basilea, "and talk awhile with my father?" And Tamael said, "No, no. Not now. Not to-night." Yet he still stood close beside her, looking down into her face, making no movement to be gone. And Basilea looked up at him, and Tamael saw in her eyes astonishment and curiosity and then, as he swayed a little towards her, something that he could not name and that set all his body trembling. "But, oh! if I kiss her," he thought, "if I kiss only her hair or the corner of her veil, she will remember the ugly things that were said of us—she will remember Porcellus." So he neither moved nor spoke.

Basilea lowered her eyes and turned away. "Good-

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by," she said, "until to-morrow." And Tamael said: "Until to-morrow." And she smiled at him and knocked upon the door of the house and went in. And Tamael resumed his invisible shape and followed her and saw her meet her father and go with him to an inner chamber where many people were assembled, waiting for the hour of the holy ceremonies. But Tamael did not go into that sacred place. He crouched down beside the door. His mind was still fevered, his body trembling. It was in the profoundest confusion of spirit that he heard the priest speak his first awful invocation: "O Master! Lord and our God, reject me not utterly, although polluted with the multitude of my sins——"



CHAPTER IX

*T*AMAEEL saw no more of Basilea that night. For a long while he lay prostrate by the closed door of the chamber. Then he rose and crept to the river-side, where he remained until morning, watching the smooth waters and the swinging stars and then the light that spread gently over the houses, giving them a strangely fresh and new-washed air.

The sun was scarcely risen when the first of the worshipers and pilgrims left the hostelry. They went in twos and threes, the men with closed lips and lowered eyelids, the women more modestly still, their faces and all their persons wrapped in shawls, so that they could not, even if they would, have seen far to right or left of them, or spoken clearly. Tamael ran quickly to the house. He was resolved henceforth to meet Basilea only in his manly shape. Yet he did not assume it instantly. He stood and watched the door of the house and the small, barred window overhung with leaves and dark blue flowers, that looked on to its courtyard at the side; and it was only when he saw Basilea appear at the window and peep out once or twice, that he went

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to a certain lonely place he had discovered and made himself into a man.

He thought she blushed as he returned and greeted her. The wall of the courtyard was between them, and Basilea, her finger to her lips, signed to him to climb it and come where they could talk more freely. And Tamael did this nimbly enough, although he had no wings to help him and some fear of Philondas to weigh him down. In truth he did not reflect upon the wall's considerable height or upon his own ignorance of all such climbing feats; his desire was to be with his beloved, and Basilea's anxious air, the urgency of her gesture, told him that their time of meeting would be short. So he hastened to her, and they conferred together hurriedly and in whispers.

"My father is angry," Basilea said. "I wished to tell you so at once, lest you should seek to speak with him later." "Does he then think ill of me?" Tamael asked, half in relief and half in sorrow. And Basilea, looking down, said: "I fear he thinks no good. He is glad you saved me from Porcellus. Yet he says you did so for some wicked end. He has forbidden me to see you." She raised her eyes, and for that moment Tamael was perplexed. He saw that she was in a measure downcast and in a measure happy. She had an excited, mischievous air that he knew well. Yet she was sad; and this new wistfulness puzzled Tamael. "You will surely not obey him?"

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he said; and Basilea answered: "No. It is not just in him to condemn you."

Once more Tamael was joyful and ashamed. The prospect of meeting his beloved secretly, of being always alone with her, unseen and unsuspected, filled him with delight. Yet he was sorry. He, who had feared above all things to encounter Philondas, was stricken because he need not do so. His conscience pricked him; and he was tempted now to speak of his sinfulness, so that Philondas' hatred, ill-founded though it seemed, might become justified in Basilea's eyes, so that she also might condemn him if she thought fit. But he could not bring himself thus to destroy the sweetness of their brief, stolen meeting. Basilea's face, behind the iron bars and their wreath of leaves and blossoms, was smooth and delicately golden; Tamael's fingers itched to touch that smoothness. Her hands, playing idly among the blue flowers, were near his lips. "Where shall I see you," he asked, "and at what hour?" And Basilea, breaking off a flower, said: "To-night or to-morrow in the wood that is beside my father's house." And Tamael put his hand upon her hand and upon the flower that was in it. But even as he raised himself to kiss them, a noise was heard, and Basilea turned and fled away. And Tamael was left holding the blue flower. It had become his, although he had not taken it and Basilea had not given it to him.

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He placed it in the bosom of his gown, and returning swiftly to the riverside, set himself where he could watch the departure of Philondas and his companions from the hostelry. There was little danger of Philondas' observing him, he thought, either now or later when he followed the party through the city. For already a tide of excited, joyful people had begun to flow into the streets of Antioch. The god Adonis, who had died, was risen from the dead, and the people rejoiced at his resurrection. They ran gayly from the houses, shouting and singing and jesting, one with another, of the young god's revived vigor and the new pleasures he tasted in the arms of his mistress Aphrodite. And listening to their lively talk, seeing the brightness that had come again into their eyes, Tamael was reminded of the words Lucius had spoken concerning the mysteries of Aphrodite and Adonis, and how the grave youth declared the parting of these two had wried God's purpose and the world's felicity. "What did he mean?" Tamael asked himself; and fell to wondering if there could, in truth, be mystic power in the love of men for women, and if he, who loved Basilea and strove to make her one with him, could be a sharer in these sacred rites? But having asked the question, he remembered that Lucius was a pagan and that his god was not the true God and that the mysteries he spoke of were

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of Hell. And he ceased at once to reflect upon the matter.

He would not dwell, to-day, on any unhappiness. Soon Basilea appeared, walking between Philondas and the good man Cyriacus, with Petronilla and the little ass behind. And because he saw her glance quickly round, and because for an instant their eyes met and renewed their tender promises, Tamael's heart leaped like a trout in Spring waters. He could have danced and sung as joyously as any pagan. And this blissful mood persisted throughout his journey to the village. Basilea did not look at him again, nor did he look often at Basilea. He walked for the most part at a discreet distance from the party, only taking care to keep it well in sight and himself well hidden from Philondas. Yet he was not so discreet that he did not, from time to time, draw level with the travelers to see how Basilea did and if she still seemed curious of the people and the things about her. Young men and old men passed her by, and being full of lechery that day, they stared very boldly at her and remarked in most insolent, ribald terms upon her beauty and the good fortune of the father and mother who had begotten such a soft-eyed, sweet-bosomed maid. But Basilea did not heed them. She went as modestly as Tamael or Cyriacus himself could have desired. There was a little smile upon her lips, a

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heaviness upon her eyelids that Tamael had never seen before.

Thus Philondas and his companions left the city and the fair stone houses and flowery gardens that lay beyond its walls, and made their way once more into the woods and vineyards. During this part of the journey Tamael remained far behind, going prudently from house to house and then from tree to tree, lest Philondas should discover he was followed. When the party reached the village Tamael parted from them altogether and hastened to the river to rest and bathe himself, for he was hot and dusty and his feet were wearied. Moreover, since he had watched the river in Antioch, he had greatly longed to know the touch of cool waters and the rippling and the strength of them. So he undressed, and having examined his naked body with some astonishment, went into the river. "It is a strange and pleasant thing," he thought, "to be a man."

His heart beat fast as he dressed himself again and ran to await Basilea. Hitherto his eagerness had been hardy and secure, unthreatened by the fear of passing time. He had been certain that Basilea would rest when she reached home and maybe eat a little after her long journey. But now he was all impatience and anxiety, thinking that she had already visited the wood and finding no one there had gone back angrily to Philondas—

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thinking that she would not come at all and that he would be compelled to spend an entire night of fever. The hour was late afternoon, the tenderest, most peaceful of all hours. In the wood the birds were silent, the flowers drowsed in the lengthening shadows, the very sun seemed to have paused and laid its shafts to rest awhile among the trees, too wearied with its day's hunting to bear them further. But Tamael was not quieted. He walked unhappily to and fro and wondered why the familiar things of the wood appeared so different now he was become a man and Basilea's lover.

Presently he saw her coming towards him, and his wildness of fear and of expectancy was stilled. On the instant, the torrent in which his senses swam was changed into a rippling as pleasant as the rippling that had lately washed his body. Basilea wore an unusually timid, bashful air. "So you have come," she said when they were face to face. "I thought perhaps you would not find this place." And Tamael, to conceal his knowledge of the neighborhood, replied: "I watched you go into your home and sought the wood at once. I trust your father did not see me?" "He saw nothing," Basilea said, and took a step or two away from him. "Let us find a bank where we may sit," she said. "I am tired." And Tamael sprang after her, and together they went to the pool that

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was in the wood and sat themselves down beside it.

Basilea gave a sigh, half in weariness, Tamael thought, and half as though she were in some manner oppressed. "It seems strange to meet you here," she said. "In Antioch I scarcely knew if I was Basilea or some other person. Here I am myself. Yet I feel I have been changed by those new places and the odd people in them." Tamael became anxious. "Not changed so that you hate me?" he asked. And Basilea answered: "No. I liked you in Antioch and I like you here. Both the old Basilea and the new Basilea like you." She smiled—slyly as though she would have him give the avowal no weight, yet shyly, as though its lightness were a mask she would be glad to pluck aside. Before Tamael could speak she went on: "But old or new Basileas cannot interest you, since you know but one. Will you not talk to me of yourself and of the cities you have visited?" And Tamael said: "I would sooner talk of you." And Basilea said: "There is nothing to learn of me save that I live here and am my father's daughter. So tell me of yourself." And for that time Tamael was turned from the enchantment of the words "I like you" and forced to enter, once again, the perilous realms of his own falsities. She did not wish, he saw, that he should draw too near to her.

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So he told her of the imagined distant land whence he had come, alone, to Antioch. "My father's home is peaceful as this garden," he said, "and it has lovely flowers in it, too, and trees and streams. Indeed this place reminds me of it, save that in our city there are marble mansions and pillars and terraces finer than any in Antioch. Every one lived happily there and labored happily, for labor was a joyful thing. To work for my father was of itself bliss, and we wished for no reward, my brothers and I, but to continue at our duties. Many of my brothers were nobler than myself. I used to watch them, I remember, when they left my father's house of a morning and went down to sail, as they sometimes did, upon the sea that was about the city. I can picture them yet, in their white robes, with their heads lifted joyfully up, and their legs flung out at each step so arrogantly that any one who saw them would have known they were my father's well-beloved sons— Oh! they were beautiful! More beautiful, more proud than any men on earth——" Tamael paused. He had not meant, when he began to speak, to say so much of Heaven, or to show so clearly his regret, his bitter, bitter longing for its glories. But the desire to tell Basilea of himself, to share with her something of his past happiness, overcame his judgment.

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And as he ceased speaking he was glad. Basilea's eyes were lit with pity. "You loved your home so much!" she said, in tender echo of his passion. And Tamael said: "I loved it beyond all things in the universe. It is only now that I am here with you that I have ceased to grieve for it." And such is the power, upon men's hearts, of truth expressed, that when he had spoken, Tamael's sorrow vanished. The vision of Michael and Gabriel and Lucifer walking in the brightness of the Heavenly morning faded from his mind, and he was soothed, restored, contented. Basilea's eyes were pitiful and her lips were sad. Tamael, completing the gesture he had begun earlier in the day, took her hand and laid it gently against his cheek. "To be with you," he said, "is a joy such as I have never known." Basilea shook her head. "I cannot believe," she said, "that this poor garden is half as beautiful as the city you describe, or that I could take the place of such companions." "You are more beautiful," said Tamael, "and when I am with you this garden is lovelier than Paradise."

There was no flaw, now, in his security. Basilea had allowed him to draw near to her, had shared his passion and his loss, had dispelled the last traces of his loneliness. No threat of discovery had come to snatch her hand from his; and though the weariness, the mood of gentle melancholy that

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was upon her, as he thought, forbade him to do more than hold her fingers to his cheek, his lips, his forehead, Tamael was happy. She sat, her shoulders resting against a tree, and he lay stretched at full length beside her. All the quiet of the evening was gathered about them. From time to time a fish splashed in the pool, or a bird flew suddenly through the deepening shadows. But the stillness closed over these sounds, even as the waters closed over the fish and the darkness over the bird. And so profoundly was Tamael sunk in this stillness, this delight, that when Basilea spoke again and he answered her, it seemed their words were but as the flutter of a wing or the flirt of a tail—little unimportant movements on the surface of his pleasure. "Was there no woman in your father's town," Basilea said, "whom you were sad to leave?" "No," said Tamael. "I never heeded women in those days." "But surely," said Basilea, "since you have been traveling you have met other people whom you loved as you loved your brothers?" "No," said Tamael. "Neither man nor woman—except you." And because Basilea's palm happened to be against his lips at that moment, he kissed it softly.

So they talked on of these and other matters that appeared of no great weight to Tamael; and the time passed, and the light was turned to dusk. After he had kissed it, Basilea had withdrawn her

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hand. But not at once and not too hastily. Indeed Tamael fancied that her fingers lingered on his cheek as though the contact pleased them. But he could not be sure, for all her movements that evening were a trifle slow and languid. And when he glanced up into her face, he saw that she still had a melancholy, brooding air. There was nothing in her eyes of the look that stirred him so when he had bidden her farewell in Antioch.

Yet once again before they parted, Tamael was to know that same sudden tumult. The night was almost come, and Basilea, drawing her shoulders up, sighed and said that she must leave him. "I must not be too late," she said, "or my father will be anxious." And Tamael, roused from the comfort in which he lay, caught at her arm, so that she could not lift herself. "Not yet, Basilea," he said. "What shall I do when you are gone?" And Basilea answered that he must wait until the morrow. "Would you have my father come seeking for me," she asked, "with sticks and sheep-dogs?" And she laughed, and Tamael, of a sudden, grew hot with anger and desire. Still lying on the ground, he held her closely. "You shall not go," he said, and pressed his forehead to her shoulder. He fancied then that she was mocking him; that her invisible lips smiled as they had smiled at Hylas, that her eyes shone cruelly in the darkness.

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But while he pondered whether he would kiss her now or punish her in some other, harsher way, he felt a touch upon his forehead, and all his anger left him. "You know I cannot stay with you, my dear," Basilea said, "however I might wish to." And he released her, and she rose, and they walked together to the edge of the wood, and so bade each other good night.



CHAPTER X

THEY met the next day in the languor and the heat of noontime; and at the first glimpse he had of his beloved, coming towards him through the wood, Tamael flushed with a new pleasure, warm and quivering as the day itself. Basilea moved slowly—for the air beneath the trees was heavy—but her body swayed a little as she walked, and her step was light.

And with their first words of greeting, Tamael felt that everything was said that need be said. They were together; they were safe; the smile that weighed upon Basilea's eyelids declared more plainly than any speech that her night's melancholy was shed and that she, too, was become part of the indolent, tremulous day. They went in silence to the pool's side and laid themselves down there, and the ardor of the sun was upon them, and the heaviness of the shade, and the throbbing of the air.

It seemed that the wood was full of a secret, kindling life. It lay half-swooning in the heat, yet beneath its quiet there was a beat of hidden pulses;

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it stretched its limbs lazily, but not in sleep. The sun bent his glances on the earth, and the earth, in answer, gave forth her richest scents, tokens and assurances of yielding. Each flower called to its unknown mate. The very trees inclined their branches amorously towards the ground, dreaming of Autumn happiness. The air trembled with the hum of insects, a low, soft note that rose and fell, withdrew and crept near again, seeming to hold all things in one prolonged, murmurous caress, and to draw them, little by little, closer and yet closer together, until at last they were entirely confounded. Tamael and Basilea, lying beside the pool, turned slowly to each other and kissed.

Tamael was happy. Such was the sweetness of Basilea's kiss, so strange, so grave, so full of wonder was the look she gave him after their lips had parted, that his love was utterly fulfilled. For that time he asked no further joy.

So they remained throughout the day, kissing and whispering of the foolish matters that concern lovers. No shadow came between them, save, towards evening, when Basilea spoke again of Tamael's life and of his travels. "Since you left your father's home," she asked, "have you ever stayed long in one place?" And Tamael, fearing the lies that he would need to tell if he acknowledged any lengthy sojourn, said, "No, not very

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long," and fell once more to kissing. From that moment Tamael was too bemused to heed the troubled look that passed from time to time across her face. He was sunken in a drowsy, half-dreaming state, as though his mind were stupefied with pleasure.

And the next day behold! she was all teasing and mockery and laughter; and Tamael, who had looked the whole night through to the fulfillment of their happiness, was mightily bewildered. She, who had been so close to him, was suddenly become a stranger. She met him late, explaining that Father Cyriacus was in the house and wanted her attention; and no fond tokens were exchanged during their short time of meeting save, here and there, a laughing word and such caresses as Tamael found occasion to bestow as it were betweenwhiles and in passing. After night had come and she had left him, he spent long hours of perplexity and pain, reflecting on her transformation. Bitterly he recalled the things that he had heard of women—how they were vain, light, unstable creatures; how the love they bore to men was but a fleshly love, destined to entrap the spirits of the sons of God and to destroy them. But on this occasion, although he felt sure Basilea was as vain and light as any woman might be, he could not say her love was of the senses. Rather it seemed she had

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no love for him at all. And at this thought Tamael fell into the deepest possible despondency, for why, when all was said, should so sweet and fair a maid conceive a liking for a devil?

And so the following morning he greeted her sadly and a trifle fearfully. They met, according to their usual custom, beside the pool, and when they had sat down, Tamael took both Basilea's hands and looked at her in a very sorrowful, earnest manner. "Basilea," said he, "you do not love me." And Basilea, looking gravely back at him, asked: "Why do you say that, Tamael?" And Tamael answered: "Because you were angry yesterday and you did not tell me the reason of your anger. If you loved me only a little you would not make me so unhappy." And Basilea said: "I was not angry with you yesterday." And Tamael was somewhat comforted.

Yet he was still conscious that something alien and disturbing lay between them. Basilea's teasing mood was passed. She was quiet to-day and gentle. But there was a hint of wistfulness about her, and her tone was saddened and constrained. "I do not know," she said, "how you can doubt I love you. It would be truer to say you do not love me." Tamael was aghast. "I not love you!" he cried, and for the first time understood the thinness, the uselessness of words, and how unless a lover's heart be known without them it may never become

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known at all. "I not love you!" he repeated, and was enraged because the heavens did not fall and punish such a monstrous blasphemy.

His vehemence did not soothe Basilea. "If you loved me," she said, and stopped and blushed furiously. And Tamael was certain, then, that in her moment's pause she had set aside her first and truest thought. "She is about to lie," he told himself. And in fact, when she resumed, she spoke fast and confusedly, like one who seeks to cover, with much noise and flurry, the retreating footsteps of his real intention. "If you loved me," she said, "you would trust me more fully. You would tell me more of yourself and of your life. You said once you were a sinner, Tamael. Why have you never told me how you sinned?"

In the distress this question awakened, Basilea's evasions were entirely forgotten. Tamael was astonished, shaken, frightened. At other times he had avoided speaking of his sin, but now his beloved's reproachful air, the knowledge of his hidden devil's nature, compelled confession. And so he began to tell her of the plot his eldest brother had contrived to overthrow their father, and of his wearing of the rebel's emblem, and of the battle and the terrible calamity that had ensued. "It was the love I bore my brother," he concluded, "that misled me. I had not meant to revolt against our father. Yet I did so,

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and the memory of my disloyalty pursues me wherever I go. Because of it I am an outcast, a stranger, an exile in every land. Oh! I was a fool, a fool, a fool——!"

Overwhelmed by his own words, Tamael sank down and hid his face in Basilea's lap. Tears were in his eyes, and in his belly was a sickness born of his impulse to confess himself completely, to rid his body and his mind of their most hateful guilt. While he struggled with the noisome feeling, Basilea's fingers touched his hair, caressing it softly. "Was that all your sin?" she asked, and her voice choked, as though she sobbed and laughed together. And when Tamael raised his head, he saw that her eyes were wet and that her lips smiled in wonder and in fondness and in pity. "Yes," he said, and the half-truth—more insidious than the blackest lie—increased his sickness. But he could not forgo her tenderness, her compassion; he could not crush his heart forever with her hatred. He hardened his stomach, swallowing painfully. "Yes," he repeated, when the spasm was passed. "That was my sin, and to me it is the greatest of all sins. I can scarcely speak of it. I can scarcely bear to think of it." Basilea's arms were about his neck. Drawing himself up, he laid his head upon her breast. "O my Basilea," he whispered. "Never say I do not love you. My love for you is the one thing

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left to me in all the world." And Basilea stroked his cheeks and pressed his head against her breast. "My Tamael," she said. "I know you love me. You must not heed my foolishness. It is because I love you also that sometimes I am afraid——" And so their quarrel ended, and Tamael's sharpest agony was calmed.

Yet all that day he remained oppressed. A dark mist of sadness had descended on him, and Basilea's fondest smiles, her warmest and most tender kisses, could not dispel it. She, after a little, was quite restored and would have played and whispered with him even as they had played and whispered in their first hour of joy. She put her curls beside his hair, comparing their blackness; she bared her arm and set it against his, laughing to see that of the two his was the whiter skin. But Tamael could not fit his mood to hers. His inclination was to lie silently and to allow the wonder of her love, which for a while had ebbed away, leaving him alone and downcast, to flow gently back and bear him up again. He did not blame her lightness—how could a woman share the remorse and the pains disloyalty inspires in a man?—yet he longed for a sympathy that would have divined his thought and linked their spirits in a common melancholy. They parted with many caresses and endearments; Basilea's eyes

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shone; her lips clung ardently to his. But it was not till later, when he was alone, that the full heat of his desire returned to him.

He spent a wakeful, agitated night, and in the morning roamed very impatiently through the woods and fields and meadows. He was to meet his beloved only in the afternoon, for Cyriacus was still her father's guest, and Basilea dared not to leave the good man too often or for too prolonged a spell. And while he wandered in this way, sorely repenting of his coldness, he thought he heard the sound of Hylas the young shepherd's pipe, and being curious to see the boy, he turned from his path and went to a certain hillock, covered with trees and bushes, that overlooked Philondas' orchard.

And there, by the orchard, was Hylas, seated on the ground and playing disconsolately upon his flute. And there also, to Tamael's astonishment, Basilea presently appeared. She was on her way, it seemed, from the beehives to the kitchens. Beneath her arm she carried a basket containing honeycomb, and on her head she wore a large straw hat such as the women of Antioch wear to protect their faces and their bosoms from the sun. At the first sight of her fresh beauty, Tamael leaped up and would have run down the hill to greet her. But jealousy pinched him, for he saw that she

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also had heard the pipes' music and had turned out of her way to speak with the player.

So Tamael stayed hid and watched them. He could not hear their words, but he could see their faces well and all their movements—the gleam of Basilea's eyes and teeth, Hylas' gestures of despair and pleading. And looking at her thus, Tamael ached with jealousy and with desire. There was a glow upon her face, a pride, a pleasure in her gait, that seemed to spread about her, like the brightness of a lamp, like the scent of a flower. Tamael had no need to hear the boy's impassioned speech to know the torment that this radiance, poured out as it were before him, must bring to Hylas. She, according to her teasing habit, spared him nothing that was tempting, nothing that was cruel. As she might have displayed a new, rich gown, she displayed her suppleness, her delicacy, all her loveliness. She mocked him; yet at the end, to Tamael's infinite pain, she did as she had so often done before, she gave the boy her hand, allowing him to kiss and fondle it before she broke away and ran, with a great show of haste and busyness, to the house.

Tamael walked on. He had been impatient; now he was in a very fever. He could scarcely contain his longing to behold Basilea and to discover, if he could, the cause and meaning of her wanton-

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ness. Despite the great distance which he traveled that day, he returned to the wood a good while earlier than the appointed hour.

But Basilea was before him. As he approached, he saw her sitting by the pool, her knees drawn up beneath her chin, her eyes bent moodily upon the water. She heard his step and turned to meet him; and seeing her face, Tamael came near to bursting into tears, so remorseful, so grief-stricken was its expression.

He took her hands and would have kissed her. But she held back. Her eyes had a stiff, frozen look, and she spoke in a strained voice, a voice tightened, as it were, one point below the point of weeping: "No, Tamael," she said. "You must not kiss me. There is something I have to tell you first. And when it is said," she added, looking away, "maybe you will not want to——" Whereupon Tamael, between distress and anger, caught her in his arms and bade her speak quickly, for there was nothing, he said, that would keep him long from kissing her.

So she began to tell him of her encounter with the shepherd Hylas; and when she had almost done, her voice broke and her frozen look vanished and she melted into tears. "Oh! I was kind to him," she sobbed. "I let him kiss my hand!" And Tamael, holding her closely, caressed her cheek

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and stroked her hair and said: "I know, my dear, I know. There is no need to tell me." Basilea stared at him. "You know?" she said. And Tamael explained to her how he had discovered Hylas and how in his jealousy he had watched their meeting. At this Basilea burst into still louder sobbing. If he, with his own eyes, she cried, had seen her wantonness, it was not possible that he should ever forget it or forgive her. "Oh! Tamael," she said. "I cannot say what foolishness, what wickedness, possessed me! I know that I was thinking of you and of our meeting and that I was full of joy and of excitement. I know, indeed, indeed I know, that I do not love Hylas!" And again Tamael caressed and kissed her. She was, in truth, a frail, wild creature, frivolous in thought, light and changing in her passions. Yet she loved him, else she would not suffer so. "Do not cry, my dear," he said. "All this is nothing since you love me. I, too, was foolish yesterday, and cold and maybe unkind." But Basilea only rocked her body to and fro. "Do not speak of yesterday!" she wept. "That is the cruellest thought of all! If you could feel such pain because you betrayed your father, what must you think of me?" "It is a different matter," Tamael said. "Mine was a true sin. Yours was the thought of it."

So Tamael spoke, consoling his beloved for the wrong that she had done him, comforting her

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for the grief that was, in fact, his grief. And at last her weeping ceased, and they lay together beneath the trees; and Tamael, remembering the cloud of sadness that confession had brought upon his soul, was at pains to kiss her very gently then, and murmur words of the tenderest, kindest sort. And after they had lain thus for a short while, Tamael understood why Basilea, the day before, had seemed somewhat too rapidly restored, and why she had not displayed the gentleness, the quiet, that his spirit craved. He knew that he was now as she was then, that is, hungry for warmer and yet warmer embraces. There came a moment when her lips burned his so hotly that he snatched his mouth away, in fear lest his pleasure might offend her mood's gravity. But Basilea asked him: "Why did you do that, Tamael?" And after he had told her, her reply was such that there was no longer fear or bashfulness in his mind or any thought at all.

So they lay in great comfort. But presently, the hour being late, Basilea rose and whispered to her lover that she would return to the wood later when supper was eaten and the household slept. That farewell was the most difficult of any, for their hands seemed to cling together of themselves, and at each embrace Tamael thought that if Basilea left him a part of his spirit would be torn away. Yet

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they said good-by: the kindly Cyriacus awaited his supper, and the whole warm night was to be their bed. And Tamael, after she had gone, left the wood and walked again in the fields and on the highroad, that he might tell the sky and the trees and the stones of the earth of the impatience and the delight that were within him.



CHAPTER XI

AND while he was thus walking in the fields and ways that were about the garden, he saw a naked black figure come leaping towards him, waving its arms and uttering gleeful cries. It was the devil Barshamoth. And as soon as he had recognized the newcomer, Tamael made himself into a devil also, black, naked and invisible to human eyes. And his heart was tightened and his throat was parched, for he guessed the words that Barshamoth would speak to him and he was filled with horror.

Barshamoth came swiftly on, and when he had met Tamael he caught him to his bosom and hugged him. "Well done!" he cried. "Well done, my Tamael, well done! I bring you messages of joy and praise from our Lord Satan. All Hell will rejoice with you to-night." And he hugged Tamael again, and Tamael, in the frenzy that the embrace aroused, clenched his teeth and grasped at the air with his crooked fingers. But he was afraid to strangle Barshamoth.

"Did I not tell you," cried the other, after he

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had kissed Tamael on both cheeks, "did I not tell you, you would make a pretty man? Did I not tell you that the dainty plum would drop into your mouth if you were careful and worked hard? And now behold the task is almost over. In but an hour or two the fool Cyriacus will be defeated. Oh! I am proud of you. It is most admirably, most excellently done!"

He was as joyful as if he himself had committed some great sin. He held Tamael's shoulders and wagged his chin, waiting, perhaps, to hear the thanks that a successful pupil owes to a wise master. But Tamael did not speak. At Barshamoth's cry of praise, a strange new thing had come into his soul. It had come suddenly, and at that moment he knew nothing of it save that in its striking it had seemed to rend his body in two, and that now it lay, a dull, hard mass, deep down within him. Above it, as it were, a hundred passions tossed and raged, like waves above a sunk volcano—loathing of Barshamoth, love of Basilea, revolt, alarm, despair. Yet with it all, his mind remained alert and watchful.

"Come, let us sit," said Barshamoth, "and talk about the matter. You have time yet, and there is no blither hearing than tales of woman's sinfulness."

So the two devils sat upon the ground, and

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Barshamoth, his first wildness being spent, began to talk, more quietly, yet with no less delectation, of Basilea's approaching sin and its agreeable consequences. He sipped his pleasure, Tamael thought, as Porcellus sipped his wine: holding it in his mouth, savoring its fragrance. And Tamael, weighed down by the unknown dullness within him, torn by a hundred all too conscious passions, listened and replied.

"Basilea will make a lovely sinner," Barshamoth was saying. "Already I look forward to the day when she will be old—like Laura, you remember her, Tamael?—and ripe for Hell." "Will she become like Laura, do you think?" asked Tamael. "Most certainly," said Barshamoth. "She is the sort which, when it has sinned once, will sin constantly and freely. I know her. No remorse or repentances will come to spoil your work. She is as good as on Hell's spits already." Tamael shivered. "And what would happen," he asked, with the best show of carelessness he could contrive, "if by some chance she did not sin with me?" Barshamoth rubbed his nose. "Oh! then," he said, "no one could guess what she would do. She might sin with the first likely fellow she encountered. Or again she might preserve her virtue to the end. These ardent natures are often taken by the Lord Jehovah as a ball is taken in the Grecian game. Their lovers fling

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them down and—hop!—they land in Heaven. But that could only come about if you were fool enough to lose her love, or if the holy Cyriacus caught you between now and your night's meeting. And I do not think," he added, grinning at Tamael, "that even you, at your most foolish, would meet with such an accident."

Then it was that the leaden mass that lay in Tamael's soul stirred for the first time, and he knew it as the dim, formless, scarcely living shape of a resolve. He could not bear to look at it. He glanced in its direction, and at once his passion rushed upon him, seeking to conceal this thing that love and pity, hatred and revolt, had brought to birth. Yet his loins increased in boldness and his mind in guile. He raised his brows and moved his shoulders. "If Cyriacus were to catch me," he said, "I do not see what harm he could do now. He has lost all power over the girl." Whereupon Barshamoth broke out angrily. "You ninny!" he cried. "You simpleton! You fool! If Cyriacus found you and knew you for a devil, he would cast you out in less time than it takes a dead sinner to reach Hell! Have you not heard of that most awful sign that destroys all sorcerer's spells, all magic incantations, that makes all devils cower and flee away? Have you not learnt that the saints of the Lord Jehovah, where they have knowledge, are all-

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powerful?" In his excessive indignation, he clenched his fists and shook them in Tamael's face. And Tamael, fearing lest his hidden mind should be discovered, hastened to answer and to reassure him. "Yes, yes, Barshamoth," he said. "I know the sign. I know its terrors. I spoke lightly and without reflection. Forgive my foolishness." But despite his courage, there was a faintness on his heart and a blackness before his eyes.

Barshamoth's good humor was restored. "It is well, Tamael," he said. "It is well. But you should not display such lightness, such imprudence in these serious matters. You must understand that if you were once turned from your Basilea, you might never be able to go back again. She would be hedged about with words and symbols, very painful and pricking to the hellish nature. And I do not think," he said, and grinned and prodded Tamael with his forefinger, "that you would enjoy the separation. You seem as deeply bitten as the girl herself. No doubt it is her purity you love? There is nothing like purity to excite the worst in men and devils." And Tamael, thinking of the merchant Porcellus, said—though more to himself than to Barshamoth—"No, it is not her purity." And Barshamoth laughed heartily. "What is it then?" he asked. "Her ardor? The promise that she gives of future wickedness?" And Tamael,

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still answering his own thoughts, said: "No, nor that either." Whereupon Barshamoth broke into a yet shriller and more prolonged peal of merriment; it was plain that, to him, Tamael's words were jests of the first order. "I know! I know!" he cried at last. "Do not tell me! I will make a guess! It is her spirit that you love! You love her soul, after the Platonic fashion! O my Tamael, you make a pretty man indeed! And no doubt you tell her this? And no doubt she believes you? Whereas all the while you love her spirit to devour it, as a devil should!" And he rolled upon the ground in a very ecstasy of glee.

And suddenly the devil Barshamoth and his laughter and his joy became intolerable to Tamael. He looked once at his companion, rolling and kicking on the ground because Basilea's spirit would be devoured, and the resolve that lay within his soul lifted itself up, and it was like a flame that lit and burnt him. It did not spring, he thought, from wrath, for he was quiet now: he rose to his feet without undue haste or extravagant gesture; and it could not spring from love, since love was to be lost therein. Yet it was so strong that it possessed him altogether, and he was as a torch that lives only to be consumed and knows only its own light and burning.

Seeing Tamael's face, Barshamoth ceased his

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rollings and his kickings. "Where are you off to, Tamael?" he asked, "so early and with such cold eyes? Is that the look you give your mistress?" But Tamael did not answer him. "Farewell, Barshamoth," he said. "No doubt we shall meet presently." And with a firm step he walked across the field, across the garden, into the house, into the room where Basilea and Philondas and Petronilla and the holy Cyriacus ate their supper.

The room was quiet. There was no sound in it but the small noises that the eaters made, munching and drinking and moving their hands, and the gentle dripping of the water-clock. Although the darkness had not entirely come, the lamp that hung above the table was lit. It burned with a steady flame, shedding a circle of light upon the four faces below, gathering them together, as it seemed, in a common glow of peacefulness. Tamael did not look at any of the faces. He strode to where Cyriacus lay, eating a salad, and shouted in a voice that caused the earthen pots to knock against the platters: "I am the devil, Cyriacus. I am the devil!"

Noise and terror sprang into the room. Philondas, with a great cry, jumped from his couch; Basilea and Petronilla likewise leaped up and screamed. Only Cyriacus remained unshaken. He rose and fixed his eyes upon the place from whence

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the voice proceeded, and his look was grave and stern yet unafraid. "And what are you doing, devil," he asked, "in this good, Christian home?" "I am here by the will of Caius Porcellus Galla, the merchant," Tamael answered, "and the spells of the sorcerer Arnaphas, in order to seduce the girl Basilea and make her sin and bring her at the end to Hell and everlasting damnation."

He spoke in the same loud ringing tone, for he feared that if he lowered it, the tension of his boldness would be loosened and he would not have strength to speak at all. And although the fire of his resolve still burned in him, although he had forever forsaken love and happiness and Basilea, he was glad at that moment to hear a little sigh behind him and then the sound of a body sinking to the ground. He would never see his beloved's face again, he thought, or hear her voice or feel her lips on his, yet he was glad that she had fainted and so would not hear the name of her lost lover.

Cyriacus, stern, grave, but quite unshaken, faced the devil. As Basilea swooned, Philondas seized a water-bottle and went to lift her up and to restore her. But Cyriacus stopped him. "Give me the bottle," he said, "and lay the girl upon the bed. If she has swooned it is that the unclean spirit has left her. I will speak with him now and rid her

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of him altogether." And he drew the couch from the table, and Philondas stretched Basilea on it, between Tamael and Cyriacus. And the saint took the water-bottle and made a sign over it and sprinkled the water upon Basilea's face and hands and body, muttering secretly as he did so. And when these and all other necessary things had been performed, he stood upright and clasped his hands; and his quiet and his boldness held and sustained the room, like a strong stake set firmly in the heart of it.

And Tamael's agony began. "What is your name, devil?" Cyriacus asked. And the devil, his fists clenched tightly and his chin pressed down upon his breast, said: "My name is Tamael." "And when did you come to this house?" Cyriacus asked. And Tamael said: "On the first day of Spring. The anemones were in the fields and the trees were full of blossom." "And what sin have you made the girl commit?" asked the saint. And Tamael raised his head and looked for the first time at Cyriacus. "No sin," he said.

Cyriacus stared at the empty air before him. Plainly he was astonished, puzzled, and also, of a sudden, curious. He glanced at Basilea, pale and insensible upon her bed, and then his eyes sought again, in the dim light that was beyond the lamp's radiance, for Tamael's invisible face. At last he

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spoke, and his tone was milder than heretofore. "How does it happen, devil," he asked, "that you have delivered yourself into my hands? I had no suspicion of you, and you say your evil work is yet undone. Was it the girl's purity repulsed you?" And Tamael bent his head and frowned and said: "Maybe it was. In every case it is not a matter that concerns you." But having spoken thus in haste, he repented of his insolence and added: "I pray you do not question me on this matter. In pity, holy man, do your business and let me go." And because the memory of Barshamoth had returned to him, a sweat broke out upon his body and he groaned aloud.

But Cyriacus was not satisfied. It seemed he was beset by a temptation that falls at times on holy men, and which is the temptation of great knowledge. He clasped and unclasped his hands, glanced up, glanced down. And presently he said: "Will you not show yourself to me, Tamael?" And Tamael answered: "No, Cyriacus." And Cyriacus said: "And if I command you to do so?" And Tamael answered: "No, Cyriacus." And Cyriacus I must obey you. But would it not be well, first, to cover the girl's face? If she awoke and saw me it might do her harm." And Cyriacus said: "That is true." So he took a napkin that was by and put it over Basilea's eyes, and then he com-

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manded Tamael to appear; and Petronilla and Philondas turned themselves towards the wall; and Tamael stood before Cyriacus in his blackness and his nakedness and with his dark wings drooping by his sides.

And the saint and the devil looked at one another, and Tamael saw in the saint's eyes anger and curiosity and astonishment. And after a little the anger passed and only interest and astonishment remained. "You are black," said Cyriacus, "but you are not ugly. This is a very strange thing." And Tamael, still fearing for Basilea, said: "O holy man! O holy man! Do not delay. Undo the words of Arnaphas. Break the spell that binds me to the girl." But Cyriacus, without heeding him, went on. "Tell me now, devil," he said. "You have an unhappy air. Were you an angel or were you born in Hell?" And Tamael answered: "I was born in Heaven." And Cyriacus asked: "And do you ever repent of your wickedness? Do you ever regret Paradise?" And Tamael answered: "Yes, yes, indeed. But it is too late, now, for regrets." And then, once again, in desperation, he cried out: "O holy man! I pray you do your work. All Hell is not worse suffering than this." And he fell on his knees before the saint, before Basilea, and buried his face in his hands.

So the saint took pity on Tamael. And he lifted

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up his voice and spoke the Name and said the words that destroy the black arts of sorcerers and free the souls of men from Satan's clutches. And when Tamael had heard the prayer that called him "source of discord, root of evil," and when he had felt the sign upon his forehead that took him forever from Basilea, he rose from his knees and fled away.





BOOK IV



CHAPTER XII

SO Tamael left the house of Philondas and its gardens and its orchards and its fields, and flew towards the desert that is between Syria and Babylon. And as he flew he looked only at the brown hills before him and at the waste of sand and stone that lay beyond the hills, for he could not endure the sight of trees or rivers or fruits or corn or any of the things that were a part of Basilea's beauty.

And when he had reached the desert he wandered there for many days. But although he discovered nothing in that place but sand and rocks, and here and there a patch of coarse, gray grasses or a dry, brown shrub, he could not escape from thinking of Basilea. His mind was stored with a full harvest of sweet, bitter memories, and wherever he turned he stumbled against a look, a word, a gesture that pricked him as cruelly as if the long sharp thorns that grew upon the cactus trees had suddenly been thrust into his flesh. After a while of stumbling he learnt to foresee these agonies, and even schooled himself to encounter them deliber-

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ately, training his mind to meet some remembered moment when Basilea had been unusually tender, unusually lovely, and then thrusting himself violently, as it were, upon the point of it. In this way he hoped to blunt the sharpness of his pain, to avoid, at least, its catching of him unawares. But while he succeeded, in a measure, in making his heart numb to memory, he could not save it from the new thoughts that assailed him. "She will love another man," he told himself, and tried to feel it would be better so, since she would marry him, maybe, and become happy. "But she may suffer and I shall not be there to comfort her," he thought, and his limbs ached and a darkness came before his eyes. And again: "She will die and I shall not know it——"

His grief was arid, lonely, illimitable and monotonous as the desert sands. But above and worse than all, it was strange; for always, after he had worn his spirit dull with thinking, there would remain the feeling that his fate was not a natural fate, that he had strayed, by some chance, into an evil dream. To be with his beloved was to be at home. With her he was in his own place, even as he had been in Heaven—a branch that grows and lives upon its tree, and if it falls, falls dead. But Tamael lived, must live forever without Basilea. It was an odd thought indeed.

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And at last this monotony of strangeness became unbearable, and Tamael left the wilderness and went once more in search of trees and streams and the society of men. He had often heard Cyriacus speak of a certain place where, in a thin solitude of palm and cactus, a company of cenobites pursued their chaste and rigorous lives. To this place Tamael took his flight, going swiftly across the sands, and then on foot through the villages that were upon the edge of the desert. And now again he assumed a man's shape, that he might the more truly feel the contact of the people and the things about him and the more readily encounter matters that would turn his mind from its obsession.

He wished to lose his thoughts, to sink, to drown them in the thoughts of other folk. To this end, when he had come among the holy men, he offered himself to them as a servant, to clean the hut which they had built them for a meeting-place, to serve their meals and labor with them in their gardens. In such ways, he fancied, he would never be alone, never unoccupied; and in such ways, too, he would hear constantly of Heaven and of Heavenly affairs and no talk of women or of sinning or of love.

The good men welcomed Tamael kindly. They would be glad, they said, to have a youth with them,

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for they were all old men, and the Christian travelers who visited their company from time to time were mostly old men likewise. And so for a while Tamael dwelt in that place, and if he found no comfort, he found at least no new unhappiness. It seemed that Hell itself was content to leave him to his miseries; he received no messages from Satan at that time, no devilish duties were required of him. Untroubled by man or devil, he cleaned the huts and milked the goats and tilled the little fields of maize and barley, and carried the monks' bowls of porridge from the kitchen to the assembly room. And every day, before he began his work and after he had finished it, he knelt and listened to the good men's prayers. He was afraid no longer of these divine and spotless mysteries; indeed he felt a bitter joy reflecting that the words which now rang in his ears were the same that Basilea spoke in distant Syria.

But his easiest moments, as he had foreseen, were those in which the good men talked, alone or with their visitors, of Christian matters. In the evening when he had washed his last dish and looked for the last time to his goats—and this was the work that he liked best, for he was frightened of the beasts and fancied that their slanting, black-slit, agate eyes considered him askance and knew him for a devil—Tamael would go to where the monks

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sat and gazed out at the empty desert, and he would sit and gaze also at the sands, purple and crimson in the setting sun, and listen to their conversation.

They spoke of every manner of Christian thing: of the sufferings the holy Church endured at that time; of the martyrs whom the Emperor Diocletian sent to the rack and to the fires, causing them thereby to go straight to Heaven; of the progress that the Truth made and the many thousand converts that turned daily to the Light, despite all persecutions.

The good men liked especially to learn of these conversions, and whenever a pilgrim or a wandering priest happened that way, they would ply him with questions concerning the souls that he, or his companions in the world, had saved. And the pilgrim or the priest would answer happily enough, so that in a short while Tamael heard many curious and edifying tales. He heard the tale of the Roman prefect, who had a magic chamber wrought of gold and precious stones wherein he could discover the movements of the stars and the fortunes of the people, and who gave up these abominations at the call of Sebastian and of Polycarpus; and he heard the tale of the Pirate of Sidon, who was wont to prey upon Christian merchants and seamen, and to torture and to slaughter

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them, yet who became, at the last, a Christian also.

It seemed that the pirate was a Roman and that he had a particular devotion to the false goddess Vesta. He set up a statue of the goddess in his house, and every morning and every evening he trimmed the lamp that burned before the idol, and added oil, and prayed; and when he was away from home his wife did these duties for him. Now it happened in the Spring of the year that the man was told of a very profitable piracy that could be made in the Western seas, beyond the pillars of Hercules. And this journey being longer than was customary, he resolved to take his wife with him. "Yet," thought he, "if I leave my house empty, who will trim the lamp of Vesta?" And he was troubled. But presently, having pondered the question, it came into his mind that if the goddess loved him truly she would tend her lamp herself. And so he laid oil before the altar and a knife to cut the wick, and prayed to Vesta that she should observe these things and behave as a goddess should. But when he returned from his voyage he found the lamp burned out and the oil and the knife lying where he had placed them. So he went to a certain priest who was in Sidon and asked to be baptized a Christian. "For," said he, "either Vesta did not wish to keep her lamp alight, in which case she no longer loves me; or else she was unable to keep

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her lamp alight, in which case she is no goddess and I do not love her." So the sinner was brought into the Christian fold.

After the story was told, one of the monks who heard it asked the teller if the pirate had left his trade and become a virtuous citizen? "I do not know," the other said, and went on to relate a story of the island of Melita and of the miraculous events that had happened in the island since the great saint Paul was entertained there. "You will remember," he said, "that it was in Melita that our father Paul was bitten of a viper yet suffered no hurt? But you may not remember that our father Paul put a blessing on the man in whose house he stayed, whereby the man and all his blood could never again be touched or harmed by vipers. And from that day to this the miracle persists. Indeed the grace of our father Paul and the faith of the people are so great, that when a woman is brought to bed in that house they put a viper in the child's cradle in order to test if it be true-born or a bastard. For if it is a bastard the viper bites it. So the blessing retains its power, and there are no unlawful children and no adulteresses in the man's house."

One day during Tamael's sojourn on the edge of the desert, it chanced that four preachers, each traveling his several way, met in the monks' com-

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pany. The first three were men such as Tamael had often seen, both here and on the roads of Antioch. But the fourth was a more eminent person. He had been a scholar, a student of the old philosophies, so that his Christian arguments were hardened by much learning, sharpened and barbed with ancient lore. And for him and for his three fellows, Tamael worked with increased diligence, making a feast with a rich stew of kid and milk and maize, and a bottle or two of the sweet Samos wine which the monks kept for their especial guests.

The discourse of the four preachers, after the meal was eaten and the fragments of it cleared away, stirred Tamael quite particularly. For a while they talked of general things, of the heresies that were abroad and of the various means by which the people hoped to approach the throne of Heaven. But presently they left the wider paths of their discussion and began to speak more narrowly of Heaven itself and of the polity of that holy land, and then of the war that was fought there and the reasons for the war. And Tamael's heart beat fast with curiosity and excitement, for he knew nothing of the true cause of Lucifer's downfall. He had been told of it in Hell, but he was certain, now, that all the devils' versions of the tale were lies.

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Said the first preacher: "It is known, my brothers, that Lucifer was the most beautiful and the best beloved of the attendant Seraphim; and it is known also that he fell from Heaven because of the pride he took in the beauty and the honor that the Lord conferred on him. But it is not widely known how his pride was first displayed, nor on what occasion he first lost favor in the sight of the Lord. It is the story of his first disgrace that I am telling you, as it was revealed to me in a vision.

"It happened in this wise. On a certain day, many ages before the beginning of this world, the Lord called His Seraphim into the Inner Sanctuary, and wishing to exalt His favorite Lucifer above all his fellows, He invited him to take the highest place and stand forever with his head among the stars, immediately beside the Throne of Heaven. But Lucifer was so full of vanity that the position did not please him. 'Why should I stand,' he said, 'even if it be in the highest place? If my Lord wishes to honor me he will provide a second Throne that I may sit and take my ease.' And it was further revealed to me that, being rebuked for his uncivil conduct, he argued with the Lord, so that the Sanctuary echoed with the noise of his disputations and his companion Seraphs veiled their faces with their wings that they might not witness the scandal.

"I must tell you, brothers," said the first preacher,

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“that it was the Archangel Gabriel himself who told this to me. As you know, only the attendant Seraphim are permitted to enter the Sanctuary and to look directly upon the Face of the Lord. So, if I had heard the tale from a lesser angel it would be hearsay and not reliable. But it was Gabriel who told me,” he repeated; and the others nodded their heads and gave their attention to the next speaker.

Said the second preacher: “It is quite true, my brothers, that pride caused Lucifer to fall. But I also have had a vision, and it seems that the circumstances were not exactly as our brother has said. According to the vision which I had—and it was a personal vision, for I myself was transported into Paradise—Lucifer learnt presumption at the very creation of the Heavenly Order. And he was not vain, as our brother said, of the beauty of his face, but of the beauty of his voice and the great gift he had for making music. I saw him in the golden glow that was before the beginning of Time, and he was alone with the Lord and the first Sons of Light. And behold the lesser angels were about to be drawn out of the Will of God, and Lucifer composed a hymn to celebrate their coming. And presently he sang the hymn, and the hymn was so beautiful and he was so overjoyed at the praise he received for it, that when the angels were made

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manifest he turned to those who were about him and said: 'I am a nobler spirit than the Lord. I have the finer voice. It was my song that made the angels beautiful and not the Will of the Lord Jehovah.' And some agreed with him. And so it was that Heaven became divided, one company remaining loyal to the Lord of Hosts and another defending Lucifer's pretensions to a superior greatness, while yet a third stood by and waited to see which side would prove victorious before commending either. And these are called the Doubters and are also damned.

"My story," concluded the second preacher, "could be proved by inference and analogy. For of all men the artist is the vainest, and of all artists the musician is the most vain. But it does not require proof, for I was there in my own spirit and saw and heard what happened." "And did you see the fight that followed?" asked the first preacher. "No," said the other, "that came to pass somewhat later." And at this they ceased to talk of Lucifer's downfall and fell to discussing the date of the great battle, and whether it had taken place on the First Day, when the Lord divided the darkness from the light, or before that day or after. "For," said the third preacher, "there is yet another story which my brothers have not related; and in this story it is said that the sons of Heaven came

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upon the earth for love of the daughters of men and of their beauty. And if this is true, as I believe, the event must have come to pass not long ago but as you might say quite lately." Whereupon the discussion became more fervent than ever. And Tamael was much perplexed.

It was the fourth scholarly preacher who restored quiet to the company and a measure of peace to Tamael's troubled thoughts. "My brothers," he said, "do not let us dispute in this fashion, forgetting that error is in all our ways and truth only in the Lord. Even as a stream catches the reflection of the things that pass above it and distorts them because it is itself disturbed and unstable, so does our human mind catch but a faint and broken image of the Truth which is in Heaven. Yet it is well to seek the truth and to grasp what can be grasped of it if only in such imperfect tales and allegories. And for this reason I also will tell you a tale, and though it may be no truer than the rest, it also will reflect, maybe, a fragment of the Divine Truth.

"Our brother has said that when Lucifer was forbidden to sit in the presence of the Lord, he fell from Heaven. But our brother has not said how he fell nor what was the direct and determining cause of that fall. For he has not spoken of the bodily constitution of the angels, nor reminded us that the wings with which they fly are

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by nature twofold, one being of love and the other of reason. Now the cause of Lucifer's downfall was that after he had been reproved for his presumption, the wing of love that was upon his shoulder lost its strength, and he came to lean only upon the other wing, namely the wing of thought. And so it chanced that one day, being forbidden to sit before the Lord and being too proud to stand, he attempted to fly. And behold the wing of love which was thus weakened, failed him altogether and he most ignominiously fell. Such, my brothers, is the tale. And it also can be proved by inference and by analogy. For by thought alone no man shall be saved. Without love no man shall truly live or see the glory of the Highest." And this time Tamael was better satisfied (although indeed he could not reconcile the scholar's tale or any of the others with what he knew of Paradise). He liked the tale because the learned priest had spoken it and because it fitted with his own way of thinking.

The presence of the scholarly teacher—his looks, which in a manner recalled those of Cyriacus, his speech, which was often obscure but always stirring—affected Tamael deeply. Before the coming of the visitors, he had been as one dazed: his mind, practiced now in the hard discipline of pain, had fallen into dullness. But the preacher's words roused him. Uneasily, like a wounded man who dreads to

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move lest his scars should break and bleed again, Tamael wakened.

"Who shall know the Heavenly Will?" the scholar said. "Like Eternity it cannot be conceived. And even as we, living in Eternity, have the illusion of time, so do we, living in the Will of Heaven, have the illusion of freedom. But since we possess, indeed, this shadow of freedom, this faint echo, this dim reflection of the Divine Will, and since to us it appears real, as times appear real, we must use it constantly and fully. For the appearance of will was given to man, as I believe, to make a movement, a weaving, between himself and the Eternal Spirit. If we do not seek and seek and strive and strive, if we allow our minds and hearts to remain inert, then there will be no movement in the world of spirit, we shall be cut off from Heaven and become as it were dead. Eternal happiness is to be one with Heaven. Worldly happiness is to feel, as often as we may, that in the exercise of our poor liberty we have of a sudden touched Heaven's Will and known the wonder of our bondage."

Of this speech Tamael understood nothing at all. But at another time the preacher spoke of human love and of its divine reality: "The whole universe," he said, "is but a movement, a seeking and striving to become one with Heaven. And everything in man—his will, his thoughts, his love—is a symbol of

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the same desire. As the Eternal Spirit is One, so do men and women strive to become one, and according to the measure of their success or of their failure, they are happy or unhappy. And it is for this reason that love is holy; it is the brightest reflection, the mightiest symbol of the Unity which is of all time. And so it is that men and women must never cease to strive together in the spirit, for it is only by such labors that love will be made perfect—as it is also by labor that thought will be made perfect—and with perfection be absorbed in the Divine One.”

And at this speech all Tamael’s longings, all his miseries broke out afresh. For he loved Basilea, yet because he was a devil he was forbidden to fulfill his lover’s destiny, he was forbidden to seek that unity which was a proper and a holy unity. What for others was a work of highest virtue, was for him a work of deadly sin. And as he continued to reflect upon the preacher’s words, he became so painfully aware of his own evil that he could no longer endure the quiet and the holiness about him. Worse than Hell itself was a virtue and a peace that he might love but could not share. And so, taking again his invisible devil’s shape, he flew away across the desert.

CHAPTER XIII

HE flew to the south and to the east, and in a little while he came to the city of Ctesiphon, which is on the river Tigris. He reached the city at night-time, and as he circled idly above it, admiring its stately buildings, his attention was attracted to a certain tower that stood beside one of the largest houses in the center of a very handsome garden. There were many towers in Ctesiphon. Tamael could see them on every side, rearing their heads watchfully to Heaven. But he was concerned only with the one tower, and when he had drawn near to it, he quickly discovered the cause of his concern. For within a painted chamber at the top of the tower was a maiden, clad in a long, black robe and a cap embroidered with curious signs, and she was making an evocation of the devil.

Tamael alighted on the winding stair that was about the tower and watched her. She was dark, he saw, and lovely, although her lips were thin and her eyes chilly-looking, and she was so uncommonly tall and so uncommonly slender, that in her seamless gown she appeared more like a

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boy disguised than like a Persian noblewoman. She stood before the brazier, and round her lay the horrid objects of her ritual—the head of the man-eating cat, the bat that had been drowned in blood, the horns of the most infamous goat, the parricide's skull, the candles of human fat in their wreaths of verbena. All the things were there that magic needed; but as Tamael examined them more closely he was puzzled, for it seemed that they were wrongly disposed about the brazier. Peering into the chamber, he sniffed the censer's evil-smelling fumes, and behold his subtle nose was not content. "She has forgotten the aloes," he thought. And again as he listened to the words the maiden spoke and which he had learned so terribly to fear, he thought that they were incorrectly uttered.

And in fact, when the young witch made her thrice repeated call, Tamael heard no roar of thunder, felt no mighty gale, was torn with no abominable horror. A little noise sounded, like the distant clapping of a door, and a gentle puff of wind came tickling his hair. But if he had not, of himself, performed the necessary act, he would not have appeared, as he did appear at that moment, in the smoke of the brazier.

He hung there and smiled, half in bitterness and half in scorn. "Here I am," he said. "What do you want of me?" But although he felt contempt for

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the wicked girl who could so readily forget her Christian virtues, he felt admiration also. The maiden's face was pale and her hands were clenched, yet she displayed none of the cringing terrors of Porcellus and Arnaphas. Indeed there was eagerness in her eyes as well as apprehension. "She is chaste," Tamael thought, "and cold as ice. If she does this work it can be only for pure wickedness' sake."

"Are you the devil?" the girl asked, staring at Tamael. She had a low, rough voice, resembling that of a boy just come to manhood, and her cool, hazel eyes were clear as water. "Yes," said Tamael, and without waiting for her further questions, told her his name and Hellish qualities. "And who are you?" he asked. And the maiden, somewhat taken aback as it appeared, answered: "My name is Shamyris, and I am the daughter of the Prince Zapur. My desire is that you should become my familiar spirit, Tamael, and bind yourself to me and obey my bidding." "Ah!" said Tamael, and for a moment there was silence in the chamber; the flames of the brazier and the candles rose upright in the quiet air, and above them a thick coil of smoke twisted itself slowly about—like an arm, Tamael thought, like a curl of hair.

Tamael sighed. "What manner of thing would you have me do?" he said at last. And the princess answered quickly: "Every manner of thing. You

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are my servant and must obey all my wishes." And Tamael smiled again. "Oh no," he said, "I am not your servant. There were errors in your spells, princess; this litter"—he pointed to the objects on the floor—"is wrongly gathered together. If I stay with you I stay because I choose, not because I am compelled to do so." Whereupon the princess's eyes grew dark and she made an angry gesture. "You shall do as I tell you, devil," she said, "now—at once!" "Try then," said Tamael. And the princess spoke a word that commanded Tamael to leave the brazier's flame and stand beside her in the circle. But Tamael did not move, save to shake his head reprovingly. "No," he repeated, "no, foolish girl. I will not do that, which would, in truth, be a perilous thing for you and would give me a power that might cause even your boldness to shudder." And in his turn he spoke a word that he had been taught in Hell but had never before uttered; and instantly the horrid things about the brazier began to stir and creep in such a manner that the princess screamed out suddenly: "Stop! Stop! Forgive me! I believe you!"

After that they talked in friendlier fashion, and the princess asked Tamael if he would, of his courtesy, attach himself to her and help her in her witch's business; and Tamael said maybe he would do that. But for a moment, still, he hesitated, and his heart

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trembled and his senses ached. For here in the painted chamber as in the emptiness of the desert and in the peace of the monks' company, his eyes held always the vision of Basilea. The hideous objects that surrounded him recalled his first night in Antioch, when he had passed, as through a black gateway, into the brightness of Basilea's presence; he looked at the princess's eager face, its narrow eyes and long, thin mouth, and in its stead he saw Basilea's tender curves and sweet, soft lips. And as he looked, he had but one impulse, which was to leap into the air and fly back instantly to Syria. But because he knew that he was free to obey that impulse, he stayed, and made the act of will that bound him to the princess.

So the work was done. And when the princess had concealed the thing that required to be concealed, and set aside the things that required to be set aside, she left the tower chamber and its painted walls and blood-smeared circle, and went down into the palace. And Tamael followed invisibly after her. Thus they went to the princess's apartment, wherein were many lovely halls, the floors tiled in brightly colored tiles, the walls hung with costly silks and carpets, the doors curiously set with precious metals. And here Shamyris removed the dress she wore beneath her magician's gown, and assumed

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the robes and headgear of a youth. And while she strode backward and forward examining herself in her mirror, Tamael examined her also, and thought she matched her clothes excellently, being without roundness of any kind and having the free, swinging gait that befits a man.

At that hour the palace was silent. The princess's women slept, and all the household. Yet by the gates, where Shamyris and Tamael presently came, seeking to leave the palace, two armed guards kept watch. But Tamael put a blindness on them, so that they did not see the princess, or, if they saw her, took her for one of their own company. In this way Shamyris passed out of her father's house, and the great gates closed behind her. "My father would kill me for this," she said when they were come into the street. "Before I called on you, Tamael, I was put to every manner of inconvenience escaping from the palace. And once, in spite of my care, my father found me as I was returning home and beat me till I bled. But now I am quite safe from him!" And in the moonlight Tamael saw the princess smile a long smile that thinned her lips into the very shape of malice and cruelty and hate.

For a while the princess walked on through the empty, moonlit streets, but having reached a certain high wall above which there hung the branches of a cedar tree, she stopped and took a rope-ladder

that she had hidden in her robes and flung the end of it over the branches. "Carry me up, Tamael," she said. "The ladder is but for show. I do not wish my friends within to know I am a witch." So Tamael took the princess in his arms and bore her into the garden that was on the farther side of the wall; and Shamyris drew down the ladder so that it swung ready for her return, and continued on her way.

In the midst of the garden was a little open summer-house. Its roof was supported by slender columns, and on its mosaic floor, softly lit by the glow of hanging, bronzen lamps, were carpets and cushions and trays containing fruit and wine. Seated on the cushions were two maidens, the youngest a frail, delicate creature, whose gazelle eyes had a timid, gentle look, the elder somewhat bolder-seeming, plump and auburn-haired—a circumstance that astonished Tamael, for he had never before seen a red woman.

Striding swiftly out of the darkness, the princess entered the summer-house. "Greetings to you, Charis," she said to the plumper of the two girls, "and to you, Kalitta." And the maidens rose and bowed before the visitor without hesitation or appearance of alarm. "Greetings, prince," said she who was called Charis, and her sister, blushing and lowering her eyes, said also: "Greetings, dear prince"

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—so that Tamael knew some well-ordered mischief was on foot and that it was not in idle venturing that Shamyris disguised her boldness as a man's.

And now the princess sat herself down upon the cushions, and the two girls served her, the elder pouring out the wine, the younger peeling for her the fairest of the fruits, which was a peach and very large and rosy. And Shamyris sat upright and motionless and smiled her thin smile and looked at neither of the girls. "To-night," she said, after she had eaten the peach and after Kalitta had wiped her fingers with a fine, white napkin, "to-night I go to the house of Chagab the Jew. There will be feasting and music and dancing. Will you come with me?" And Charis answered quickly: "With all my heart, prince, if you can keep us hidden from our father and from our father's people." And Shamyris said: "I will hide you. I also like at times to watch and to enjoy such things in secret"—and then, glancing at Kalitta, added: "But maybe it would be well to leave the little dove at home. I think she is too young and timid for the adventure;" whereupon the younger girl's eyes filled with tears and she bent her head unhappily. Her sister laughed. "The little dove is timid," she said, "but she loves you, prince. Where you go she will follow." And Kalitta said: "O Sister! Sister! I pray you do not shame me so!"—and wept and blushed

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amidst her tears. And Tamael, seeing her distress, was moved to pity. Almost he could have wished that Shamyris would show kindness to the girl, although, in truth, her kindness might be as shocking as her cruelty.

But the princess did not speak. She remained still and smiling, and her glance, which was fixed upon the weeping Kalitta, was strangely satisfied. It was not until Charis leaned forward and whispered: "Shall we then go alone together, prince?" that Shamyris ceased her slow, contented staring and said: "Oh, no, Charis. One woman is poor entertainment. We will take the little dove."

At this Kalitta dried her tears and smiled again into the princess's face. And Shamyris rose, and all three prepared to leave the garden. They went softly, the little Kalitta trembling, despite her eagerness, her sister with a sterner courage. And at the outer wall the princess took the maidens in her arms, each in turn, and made a pretence of carrying them up the ladder and down the farther side; and Tamael, unseen and dutiful, carried the princess. He found the double burden heavy, especially when it was the elder sister whom Shamyris held. For whereas Kalitta made herself as tense and light as might be, Charis drooped with all her plumpness on the princess's bosom.

In the streets Shamyris and the companions pro-

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ceeded quickly and in silence. Both maidens had drawn their veils about their faces, and Tamael could see nothing of Kalitta now but her great black eyes, turned always on the princess. She was very much afraid, he thought; her look, when the party stopped at last before a little door, hidden between the half-columns of a mighty wall, said plainly that it was only from the sight, the nearness of her dear prince, that she drew courage to pass through the sly, winking door and enter the dark passage beyond. The princess, Tamael observed also, was well aware of Kalitta's alarm. Yet she did not seek to soothe or to relieve it. As they stepped into the darkness, a man ran suddenly out clasping his side with his hands. "Where wine goes in, blood will come forth," said Shamyris; and Kalitta gasped like one who sinks in deep waters. Tamael glanced back at the night and sighed, thinking of Antioch and of Basilea.

The passage stank with the thick smell of food and wine and burning oil and incense. In it, too, was a noise, soft at first but growing louder as Shamyris and her companions advanced, until it burst upon them at the entrance of the dancing hall in a great roar of clashing cymbals, piping flutes and singing voices. The hall was full of men and women, eating, drinking, laughing, kissing. They lay, their heads crowned with flowers upon cush-

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ioned beds, and in the midst of them a group of naked women danced and sang and made shrill music. About the walls were pillars and a raised marble platform, and between the pillars were curtains, hung in such a manner as to form recesses, screened from one another and from the mass of the people. To one of these recesses Shamyris led the maidens. Wine and cakes were there and a dish of amber-colored sweetmeats unknown to Tamael. Going to a large silken couch that overlooked the hall, the princess put an arm about each of her companions and drew them down beside her.



CHAPTER XIV

So the princess and the maidens lay in the shadow of the curtains and looked out at the hall, which was dim with the smoke of burning censers and of torches, and breathed the heavy odors that were in it, and drank the wine the slaves poured out, and watched the dancers. And Charis, after she had drunk, leaned her head against the princess's shoulder; and Kalitta trembled because the arm of Shamyris was about her waist. As for Tamael, he lay likewise—but invisibly—upon the cushions, and stared at the people, and thought how happily the wine had linked them all together, binding their minds and bodies in a common ease. And he felt a little proud—as is the habit of sober folk set among drunkards—and he felt envious, for pride is dry comfort and he would willingly have drunk and been rid of it, if by the same act he could have been rid of his intolerable loneliness.

The dancers stamped their feet and snapped the brass clappers that were on their fingers. They gazed steadily before them, a fixed smile upon their lips, their heels striking the ground stiffly. But while

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their faces remained rigid, untouched by the disquiet of the music, which was becoming at every moment shriller and more hurried, their bodies swayed and jerked and shuddered as though a frenzied wind blew them. Their arms coiled above their heads like flames or rippled down their flanks like water; their breasts shook and leaped like the crests of waves. And presently, as the music continued to increase in wildness, they began to turn their heads from side to side, at first slowly, as if in refusal of some looked-for pain, but soon so swiftly that it seemed they were made mad by excessive torment or excessive pleasure. They sank on to their knees and then back until their shoulders touched the ground, and still their heads rolled from side to side and their bodies writhed and jerked and trembled.

A murmur ran through the hall, a dull, confused sound, half sigh, half groan. For a time the people had watched the dancers indifferently. Despite the clashing of the cymbals and the persistent outcry of the flutes, they still laughed and chattered, calling to each other from time to time and shouting lewd jests and exclamations. But as the music, beating with the beat of their own pulses, hastened its pace and their blood's flow, they became quieter. Little by little their voices sank; the men's hands tightened on the cups and on the women they held; their

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eyes took on a fixed, staring look. Meanwhile the slaves, stepping softly between the beds, had extinguished many of the torches, so that the hall was dark save for a circle of light that was about the dancers. Looking down from the recess, Shamyris and the maidens could see the people only as a mass of dim, gray shadows. But they heard the murmuring sound grow long and anxious, and when at last the dancers ceased their quivering and lay still, they saw that the shadows stirred and shifted in the darkness.

Charis stretched herself against the princess's shoulder. In one hand she held a cup of wine; with the other she rubbed her thigh lazily. "The women are ugly," she said. "Their bodies are thick and soft and their faces are ill-painted. I would look better than that, prince, if I danced for you." She raised her cup and drank. But her movements were unsteady; a little of the wine was spilt, and she, to keep it from her gown, pulled the silk open, so that the wine trickled on her bosom. The princess removed a drop of it with her finger. "The hussy!" thought Tamael, looking at Charis. But in truth he was more indignant with the princess than with the girl she fooled, for Shamyris had made her gesture carelessly, as though it were a cup she touched or a bowl or any other lifeless object. She did not heed Charis's low laughter or the way

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the girl's eyes opened and closed like a cat's eyes. "She is wickeder than Porcellus!" Tamael reflected. Kalitta, lying motionless on the princess's farther side, watched her sister and Shamyris anxiously.

The slaves were moving once again between the couches, filling the cups and lighting the torches. In the sudden brightness the people had a stupid look; their dull eyes blinked, their mouths yawned wearily. But soon the slaves returned, carrying dishes of the amber-colored sweetmeats that were unknown to Tamael; and when the people had eaten the sweetmeats they instantly awoke to a new and yet noisier intoxication. Where there had been chatter there was shouting, and where there had been laughter there were screams. One man, snatching the first woman who came to his hand, leaped upon a table and fell to dancing a very obscene, clumsy dance; another burst loudly into song; whereupon all those who were about him sang likewise, repeating his words again and yet again in drunken obstinacy. Two women especially seemed to find pleasure in the song. They stood, crouching a little forward, their hair loosened, their dresses half torn from their shoulders, and slapped their knees and shouted the refrain so often and so wildly that Tamael marveled, and Kalitta blushed, for the women were near to the recess and the song was of an unusually licentious nature. "You are prudish, sis-

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ter," said Charis, mocking her. The princess took one of the amber comfits and put it to Kalitta's lips. "Eat this, little dove," she said. And the girl obeyed her.

And now, as the din was becoming well-nigh too great to be borne, a company of musicians came into the hall, following a graceful, fair-complexioned youth, dressed after the Grecian fashion and carrying a lyre. The musicians having sat themselves upon the carpet that was in the midst of the people, the youth proceeded to play upon his lyre and to sing in a gentle, crooning voice. And seeing him, the people ceased their uproar. "Oh! the little Eros!" cried one woman; and another: "He is lovely as Tammuz himself." Both men and women pushed their cups aside and craned their necks the better to behold the youth. And in a moment the hall was altogether hushed; Tamael, glancing curiously about it, saw nothing but silent, uplifted faces, mouths agape and eyes raised dreamingly to heaven. Indeed, such was the power of the song that in another moment many of the people broke into tears. The young man told of love and the enduring sweetness of it, of youth prolonged and age made fair, and behold the drunkards wept. Those who had been boldest in their revelry, sobbed the loudest. The two women whom Tamael had observed, their cheeks scarlet, their mouths contorted, their hands smacking their naked knees for joy of

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the licentious refrain, lay weeping in each other's arms. "Alas! Alas!" they moaned. "How cruel is life! How bitter is the love of men! Would I were a child again, would I were a little child——"

But at the conclusion of the song, the cymbals clashed furiously, the flutes screamed; dancers ran forward, tossing rose-leaves here and there; and the people, their tears unwiped upon their faces, drank and laughed more noisily than before. The singer, forgotten save by a few who tweaked his tunic and bade him drink with them, had left the center of the hall. It seemed that he was proud, for he drew his skirts from the men's hands without a look, and gave no word in answer to their invitations. He had reached the door when Shamyris signed to a slave to stop him. "Tell the singer," she said, "that the Prince Iddin would have his company at supper." And this time the youth, after a quick glance at Shamyris and her companions, complied, although with something still of coldness in his air. He bowed before the princess. "Mikkon of Miletus greets you," he said, and came into the recess. He was a pretty fellow, Tamael thought; his painted cheeks were a trifle blub, yet smooth and shapely, his mouth was delicately curved, his hair well cared for. Charis's eyes shone with pleasure at the sight of him, and even little Kalitta appeared content that he should lay his scented body by her.

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Shamyris watched her guest and the two maidens. The slaves had brought them meat and fruit and flowers and more wine, and now the party ate and drank together in the shadow of the curtains. And Mikkon, stretched in a graceful attitude between Charis and Kalitta, began to talk of the cities he had visited and the praise and honor he had received therein. But no one save Tamael heard him; Charis, reclining fondly on his shoulder, was too intent upon the movements of his lips to heed the words that issued from them; Kalitta was concerned only with her dear prince. Excited and confused by the sweetmeat she had eaten, the little creature had seized a dish of melon soaked in honey, and was attempting to put morsels of it into the princess's mouth. Shamyris pushed her aside. "Go feed our handsome guest," she said. "He likes girls and sugar better than I;" whereupon Kalitta, distressed but obedient, turned to Mikkon. "In Alexandria," he was saying, "two thousand people carried me in triumph. In Rome the Emperor himself sent me a golden armlet and a wreath from his own brow." "Singer," said Kalitta, holding out a slice of melon, "my prince bids you eat this." But Charis caught at the fruit in passing and thrust it, laughing softly, upon Mikkon. The young man ate the dainty; and Charis wiped the honey from his lips with her lips.

In the hall the mist of smoke and incense grew

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more dense; the noise increased; the people became at every moment wilder. A company of Indian women, clad in heavy embroidered skirts and scarves, and wearing thick gold rings upon their ankles, were singing a lascivious song. Their arms and feet were black but their faces were masked with bright yellow paint, which circumstance gave them, as Tamael thought, a most unnatural look, as though their heads were not their own. While they sang, they danced after the manner of their country. Their bodies moved but little, yet from time to time the chief singer sprang into the air, alighting with a great clatter of her metal anklets, and from time to time, also, her companions spun themselves violently about, so that their skirts stood in a stiff circle round them, or crept to the edge of the carpet in a peculiar shuffling way, their two feet held together and advancing as one foot. Mikkon, who had raised his head from Charis's bosom in order to examine the women, exclaimed disdainfully. "What strange barbarities!" he said. "These creatures are ugly as performing fish! If I may say so, prince, Persia has done very foolishly to throw off our Western refinements."

At this Shamyris, for the first time, spoke to him. She was not overpleased, Tamael observed, at the turn her plans were taking. While the party supped she sat apart and watched, with narrowed eyes and

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tight-drawn lips, Charis's effrontery, Kalitta's excitement, Mikkon's growing intoxication. Plainly she was impatient; when the younger maiden caressed her hands or nestled with tender, urgent little movements, to her side, she put the girl away more coldly ever than before. "I did not invite you here, Mikkon," she said, "that you might praise or blame my city. As it chances, the maidens I have offered you are Greeks. But my gold is Persian. If you would have it, curb your Attic vanities and give better heed to my women."

It was as though a thin wind, unforeseen and chill, had blown upon the party. Kalitta paused in the act of placing a new garland about the princess's neck and opened her great eyes, which were become bigger, Tamael thought and more melting, as her agitation increased; Mikkon drew himself up, and on his face appeared astonishment and wounded pride and the dawning of a slow, drunken anger; Tamael remembered the princess's sudden fury in the tower chamber. Only Charis was untouched. Disheveled and shameless, she clung to the singer. "In truth he is paying excellent heed to your women," she said. "We are very happy, are we not, Kalitta?" "He is not doing as I wished," Shamyris said.

And now Tamael understood the full wickedness of her intention. Mikkon had thrust his body for-

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ward, his face close to hers. "What do you mean, prince," he said, "with your talk of women and of Persian gold?" And Shamyris, repenting, it seemed, of her impatience, smiled at him and put an arm about Kalitta and pulled her down so that she lay across the singer's knees. And the little creature mistook the gesture and smiled also and kissed her dear prince's hand. But an instant later she sprang up, a look of madness in her eyes, her fingers clutching at the gold pin that was in her hair. For Shamyris had undone a fine diamond brooch she wore, and holding it before the singer, had whispered in his ear words that Kalitta heard and Tamael divined. Even as Kalitta leaped wildly to her feet, Mikkon laughed his scorn and his refusal of the gift. "Mikkon takes," he said. "He is not given. I do not want your jewels or your woman."

For that moment Tamael did not look at the singer's drunken pride or at the princess's fury. He had seized Kalitta, and although in the darkness and the confusion of the scene it appeared that Shamyris restrained the girl and held her so that she did not harm herself with the gold pin, in fact it was the devil contained her struggles, while Charis screamed and Mikkon sprawled upon the cushions and gasped in surprise and horror.

The princess betrayed no agitation. She stood erect, holding as it seemed the frantic Kalitta.

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When at last the maiden, exhausted by despair, by Tamael's grip, by the sweetmeat's intoxication, collapsed upon her shoulder, Shamyris drew the gold pin from the girl's fingers and threw it into a corner of the recess. Save for the gleam in her hazel eyes, this was the only sign she gave of her icy, terrible rage. She signed to Charis. "We must take this silly creature to her bed," she said, and then to Mikkon: "As for you, I do not think you will sleep well to-night;" and so, still holding the girl, went swiftly from the hall. Charis followed. Out in the freshness of the night, Tamael looked anxiously upon Kalitta's face. "Can women suffer then so fiercely?" he wondered; and sighed, thinking of Basilea.



CHAPTER XV

TOGETHER Tamael and the princess bore Kalitta to her home. And there Charis, sobered by fear both of her sister's state and of discovery, laid her on her bed; and Shamyris returned over the wall and so back to the Jew's house. Tamael went with her. "What would you have done," he asked, "if I had not been by to save the child?" "No doubt I would have let her kill herself," said Shamyris. "Yet I am glad you stayed her. If the fool had died it would have caused too dark a scandal. Her father is a man of consequence." "She may yet do herself a hurt," said Tamael, recalling the little creature's horror-stricken look. "Oh! no," said Shamyris. "I will show some small kindness to her in the morning. In every case she will forget. Chagab's comfits are strangely dulling to the memory." And dismissing Kalitta, she fell to talking of the Greek Mikkon and of the vengeance she proposed to take on his consuming pride and insolence.

They found the singer in the heat and heavy odors of the dancing hall. Dawn was nearly come yet he lingered, still drunk, and boasting, to a circle

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of no less drunken comrades, of the women he had seduced from the Prince Iddin's bed, caressing the one under her master's very nose and sending the other mad for love of him. "She would have killed herself," he said, "because I scorned her. See! Here is the bodkin I tore out of her hand!" And he held aloft Kalitta's golden pin. But at this point his story was cut short. Shamyris stood smiling by him. "Come with me, hireling," she said. And Mikkon felt himself dragged towards the door by an unknown and terrifying hand. His companions laughed, for to all outward show the slim young prince had the singer by the ear and was leading him as easily as if he were a little child. But Mikkon knew it was no human power grasped him; even as he knew, when presently he came into the street's gray morning light, that while his companions did not cease to laugh and point as if he were stumbling still behind the prince, he was in fact snatched suddenly up and carried away into the air. "Take the fellow to the tower," Shamyris had said. Between terror and the last stupors of wine, Mikkon neither cried nor struggled.

So Tamael brought him to the magic chamber; and after Shamyris had returned to her father's palace, and had rested, as was her custom, the whole day through, she came also to the chamber, to enjoy and to increase the singer's punishment.

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He was already in a pitiable state, for he had lain without food or sleep, and in so profound a horror that he shook as with the ague. He was unbound, yet if he sought to move, he could not. His eyes told him he was alone, yet as he stared at the painted walls, at the last ghastly relics of the princess's work, he knew that it was not so, that something more terrible than bloody heads and skulls was by him. Thus it happened that when Shamyris appeared, clad in her sorceress's gown and with her short curls free upon her neck, he wept for joy and for relief. "Oh! Save me, save me!" he sobbed, and crawled towards her.

But Shamyris did not leave him long in hope. The occasion, Tamael guessed, was sweet to her as kissing to a lover. "Look at me," she said, and smiled as recognition and renewed terror came to Mikkon. He stared, screamed, fell back, screamed again. "A woman," he cried. "A witch!"—and then—"Oh! what will you do to me?" "I do not know," said Shamyris. "I have not reflected on the matter." And because suspense is crueler than pain, she drew away and sat down upon a chair and proceeded to recite, more to herself than to her victim, the many forms of torture and of death to which she might submit him.

The singer groveled in the ground. He writhed, he groaned, he wept. Yet Tamael saw that, despite

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his fears, he had from time to time a quivering of hope: he took care to wipe his tears so that they did not make his face unsightly; he contrived, in the midst of his abjection, to twist and turn his rounded limbs in not too ungraceful a fashion. Perhaps the keenest pleasure Shamyris enjoyed at that moment, the devil thought, was the certainty that Mikkon strove to move her pity, maybe to please her heart, with his pretty face, his plump man's body. "The people of China," said Shamyris, "have a number of agreeable punishments. There is death by slow, prolonged pain, and death by slow, prolonged pleasure. There is the torture of the bell and of the rat. But you have no liking, if I remember right, for Eastern barbarities. I must devise a death to suit your nicer taste." "O lovely lady," moaned the singer. "Forgive me! Had I known you were a woman and so beautiful I would not have looked at your companions!" Shamyris frowned. "What does the fool say?" she asked, and then, catching his meaning, laughed. "It was my wish," she said, "that you should look at my companions." And she fell again to murmuring of iron rods, heated and applied to the soles of naked feet—of water, poured drop by drop upon the head, inducing madness.

At last—"I have it!" she cried, "a very elegant Roman death!" And bidding Tamael take the singer in his arms and follow her, she left the

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chamber. Once again the devil watched her assume her man's disguise; once again he went with her through the vast, brightly colored halls; once again he put a blindness upon the guards, so that they thought it was a messenger passed presently out of Prince Zapur's stables, riding a white horse and carrying a bundle. "My father has a country house," said Shamyris, "wherein all manner of foods are cultivated for our table. Among them is a fine tank of lampreys. You will recall, Mikkon, how a certain emperor was wont to feed these fish? My father's fish will sup to-night more nobly than the Cæsar's." And, in fact, when they had come to a house built near the river and surrounded by byres and sheep-pens and dovecotes, as well as orchards, olive-groves, fields and vineyards, she took the now prostrate Mikkon to a tank full of great eels, and with Tamael's help, bound him and set him in it, his body beneath, his nose and lips held just above the water. This being done, she sat herself down beside the tank and watched with infinite ease the singer's agonies, the grimaces that he made, the absurd kickings and tossings of his legs and arms, the twitchings of his flesh as the fish nosed and bit at it. He could not cry out, for whenever he opened his mouth the water ran into it; he could not escape, he could not even drown himself; his neck was gripped by an iron ring, and willy-nilly he must live

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until terror or the fish had had their way with him. Shamyris drew a bag of sugar-plums from her pocket and began to eat them. "Sing to me, Mikkon," she said. "You have declared that it was love for your surpassing charms that drove me to jealousy and vengeance. Sing, and maybe I will love you still better." And she threw a plum on to his lips, thereby causing the fish to lash their tails and wriggle more teasingly than ever.

So Shamyris took her pleasure. But after a while Mikkon's kickings became less. Soon they stopped altogether; and the princess, seeing him limp and apparently lifeless, yawned and stretched herself and presently rose. "All things grow dull with time," she said. "The fellow is no longer entertaining. Let us go home, Tamael." And she left the singer and rode back to the palace. But Tamael, directly she slept, returned to the tank, and having delivered Mikkon from it, carried him far from the city of Ctesiphon. Naked and transfixed by fear and wounds, the singer opened his eyes. "Whatever other folly you may commit," said Tamael, "do not again visit Ctesiphon." And Mikkon, thinking no doubt that he dreamed, nodded and said that, indeed, he would leave Persia forever. And Tamael flew to Prince Zapur's palace, and when the princess asked him if he knew how the singer did, replied that he was dead and eaten.

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Such were the ways of Shamyris, such the offices she required of her familiar spirit. And so it was that Tamael became skilled in sinning. The nights passed, each with its tale of mischief and of cruelty; the mornings came, and commonly the princess slept and Tamael was free to indulge his humor as he chose, to roam or to lie still, to dream of past happiness or to fly desperately over the plains and hills of Persia, seeking exhaustion and forgetfulness. But sometimes the days also were occupied with evil-doing. Prince Zapur would give a feast or other palace entertainment, and at such times his daughter must perforce exchange her manly coats or witch's gown for a princess's robes and jewels. Surrounded by her women, she would lie at her father's banquets, looking, with her thin body and long eyes, like a snake among pigeons. And here again, to amuse her idleness she would devise some subtle horror, putting a madness upon the folk about her, so that they were brought, despite themselves, to suffering or punishment.

Tamael had not been long in Ctesiphon before a peculiar disquiet, secret and insidious as slow poisoning, had come upon Prince Zapur's household. The slaves crept furtively from room to room, fearing the accidents that happened and that caused them to be lashed or tortured; the guests looked at one another suddenly, their hands upon their sword

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hilt, astonished at the things they seemed to see as they passed through the gold-carved doors, amazed at the foul words they thought they heard whispered in their ears. Soon Prince Zapur became aware of the silence, the anxious gloom that had fallen on his palace. One by one his friends were leaving him; his slaves escaped by scores, preferring the risk of death to the certainty of terror. He could make nothing of the matter. In his presence Shamyris was smiling, dignified, discreet, displaying neither excessive concern nor unseemly carelessness.

Only Tamael knew of the delight that this increasing horror brought her. "My father," she said to him one day, "has been summoned to the king's palace. It seems that, since our great banquet, the Prince Sinrabi—you recall him, Tamael?—behaves very oddly. He goes naked on his hands and knees and howls like King Nabukhudurussur of old. The King of Kings wishes to discover if there is an especial reason for his madness." Picturing no doubt the prince's ravings, the king's displeasure, her father's fears, Shamyris smiled. Tamael shook his head. "How you must hate your fellows, Shamyris," he said, "to find such pleasure in their sufferings!" "I do not hate them," said Shamyris. "Do you think that I am lustful? I am angry sometimes, but that is nothing. I like to see men act and feel vigorously. If happiness were as curious a spectacle as pain I

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should enjoy it also." Tamael was so indignant with her on this occasion that when she slept he made a vision and put it on her eyes, and instead of leaving her as was his habit, he sat all day by her couch and watched the sweating and the shivering his nightmare provoked. But by evening she was awake and contriving wickedness as coldly as before; and Tamael was helping her. In all her plots he had his share, for though he had retained a measure of freedom, he could not wholly disobey the princess, he could not break the oath that bound him.

And living this dark life, Tamael's heart grew dark likewise and numb and heavy. Summer turned to Autumn, Autumn to Winter, and now the joys that he had known in Syria shone as far distant as the joys of Heaven. He thought of them with the same longing, the same bitter pain. They were still reality; the present was still a strange, distorted dream. Yet, little by little, it seemed that he was sinking deeper in the dream. The pictures that his memory evoked were less clear, less easily formed. Often in the brilliance of the palace or in the noise and stench of Chagab's dancing-hall, he would try to remember Philondas' garden, the actual drooping of the willow-tree, the shape and touch of blossoms; or again, issuing at dawn from a tavern by the riverside that Shamyris also visited from time to time, he would look upon the Tigris and try

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to see again the swift, silky waters of Antioch's Orontes. But he could not. Whether from some inner weakness of the faculties or from the mere outward press of things, falling on him leaf by leaf, all alien and all ugly, his vision was obscured. Not the least of his sufferings was that, while the anguish of his loss lingered, the beauty of his memories died.

He had reached the final dullness when, upon a certain night, he went again with Shamyrís to the Jew Chagab's house. To Tamael, as yet ignorant of Winter, the season brought an increase of melancholy. He had spent the day among the canals and fields that were beyond the city, and the sight of the invading rain, its mighty, moving columns that marched between heaven and earth so slowly, so solemnly yet with such gray indifference, had left him downcast. The troubled, swollen river distressed him, the multitude of weeds that lay upon its banks, torn up and scattered by the careless wind, filled him with sadness. Returning at evening to the dark, scarce visible mass that was Ctesiphon and its twin Seleucia, he remembered the night of his first coming to Antioch and knew a deeper sense of weariness and desolation than he had ever known before.

That night Shamyrís lay, not in the curtained recesses that were about the hall, but at a table in the midst of it. She liked at times to mix in this

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way with the people, to talk to them and listen to their chatter. So she was resting on her bed, her arm clasping a dancing-girl whom she had chosen to keep her company; and Tamael was lying by her, wondering which was the more tiresome, the gray monotony of rain or the shrill monotony of music and lights and sickly odors of the Jew's house, when a man and a woman appeared in the hall's doorway. Even at that moment, although Tamael could not clearly see the woman's face, could not recognize the fashion of her close-knotted hair, could not divine the limbs that moved beneath her fine, silken, jeweled dress, he felt as if a hand were of a sudden closed upon his throat. Beside the princess was an empty couch, and to this couch the man and the woman came. They walked through the smoky hall, and as they drew nearer and yet nearer and finally laid themselves down beside him, Tamael saw that the woman was, in truth, Basilea.





BOOK V



CHAPTER XVI

ECSTASY because she lay beside him, anguish because he could not take her in his arms, horror of the sin her dress, her jewels, her presence in Chagab's house proclaimed, jealousy of her companion, hatred of himself—all these passions held Tamael, and with them, also, came bitterness because he had torn his heart in two for no good purpose, and anger because he was bound to Shamyris, and a terrible aching sorrow, because Basilea's face was sad.

Her beauty had not changed, he thought, gazing helplessly at her. The knotted fashion of her hair aged her, and the long, silken, pleated gown she wore. But despite these things, despite the paint that reddened her mouth and the dark powder that was on her eyelids, she was the same as she had been beside the pool when Petronilla had first called her name and Tamael had leaped into the air for terror and desire. She stretched herself upon the cushions with the same careless ease that made her body graceful in Philondas' garden; the looks she gave her companion were the same—save for the sadness

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in them—as the looks she flung at the village hinds and shepherds when they came courting her. “Why is she here,” Tamael asked himself bitterly, “if she feels coldness towards him and contempt?” He could not doubt the man was Basilea’s lover. But in this, as in every other matter that concerned her, he could do nothing now, he thought, but wait and watch, in ecstasy and wretchedness.

It seemed that she was angry with the man. He was a dark, not uncomely youth, dressed in the straight blue habit of a Persian. But although he showed the utmost care of her, consulting her wishes in the choice of meat and wine, and when she did not answer him, bidding the slaves bring everything of Chagab’s daintiest—sturgeon’s eggs, a Scythian pheasant, figs of Singara, famous for their sweetness—Basilea neither spoke nor smiled. She ate a little, drank deeply—to Tamael’s dismay—of the honeyed wine; but all in silence. And presently her companion grew impatient. “Basilea,” he said, his tone half anxious, half resentful, “will you never speak to me again?” “Oh! leave me, leave me,” said Basilea. And in the pause that followed, big with approaching conflict, Tamael held his breath and listened to the echo, within him, of the voice that whispered, “It is because I love you, Tamael, that sometimes I am afraid.” Shamyr, who had been watching the newcomers with profound atten-

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tion, smiled. "That is an unusually lovely woman," she said to her invisible familiar. "Yes," said the devil. "What of it?" "Nothing as yet," said Shamyris, "but that I must make friends with her." In the midst of his rapture, his despair, Tamael found room for the unspoken vow that every foulness in Hell would come to Shamyris before she hurt Basilea.

The Persian bit his lip, frowned, clenched his hands. It was plain that the anger that was between him and Basilea was about to burst forth. And this it immediately did, and so sharply that Tamael felt certain both had been ready, even eager for the quarrel. Clearly the Persian's injuries, long contained perhaps, had brought him to the point where exasperation is a tempting open pit, and speech an increasing giddiness, leaping gladly to disaster. He hung but a moment on the brink. "You are difficult to please, Basilea," he said. "Each little thing offends you. The most that can be done is not enough. What keeps you in this dark temper?" "Nothing," said Basilea, careless and brooding. "Weariness—the length of days—" Whereupon her companion's forbearance left him and he sprang, as it were, furiously forward. "Weariness!" he cried. "Of what can you be weary? Have I not given you all you wished of love and entertainment? Were you not happy to leave Antioch? Were you not

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glad to see my country? Or is it I that have wearied you in this short while? I brought you here. I thought you loved me. It seems it was my kindness and my gold you loved, since you talk now of weariness, and cry 'let me be' the whole day long! By all the devils!" He struck his fist upon the table. "By all the devils, if you say it but once again I will take you at your word!" And at this Basilea broke out no less furiously. "I say it now!" she cried. "I do not love you! I have never loved you! Leave me!"

Thus they fell into exasperation. Basilea, as she uttered her last cry, had gathered herself up so that she sat erect and tense, one arm pointing at the doorway; and the Persian, astonished, as Tamael divined, but pinched by pride and anger, had jumped to his feet. For a moment they stared at one another. Then the man turned, drew out a handful of coins, threw them on the table and strode away. Basilea's body relaxed, sank down; she lay still, gazing before her.

Tamael and the princess watched her. During the quarrel they had remained silent, each intent upon his own preoccupations, and motionless, save when Shamyris, with a curt gesture, dismissed the dancing-girl. Now, as Basilea stirred, raised herself, pressed her fingers to her eyes as though some painful image lingered there, the princess leaned forward and laid her hand—very gently, Tamael

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observed, very compassionately—upon her lovely neighbor's arm. "Sweet lady," she said. "You are tired. That brutish fellow behaved very ill. Will you not rest awhile with me and let me care for you?"

Basilea started and stared at Shamyris. Her impulse, as Tamael saw, was to reject the offer angrily. But there was something in the princess's face of such respect, such kindness, such deep solicitude, that Basilea wavered, let her indignation cool, smiled at last at the supposed Prince Iddin. "I thank you," she said. "It is true that I am tired. But I fear to be a sorry guest. I am in no mood for pleasure——" "I only ask to serve you," said Shamyris, "to be the humblest of your friends——" And whether it was again her gentle tone, her kindly air, her seeming sincere compassion, or whether it was that solitude had become intolerable to Basilea, the girl yielded and came and lay beside the princess. And Tamael also lay by Shamyris, heedless of the noise about him and the heavy odors and the people, and listened to his beloved's voice and gazed and gazed into her face. He longed to seize her, to caress her dear, recovered loveliness, yet he dared not so much as touch her hand. He could not tell what evil the princess plotted, and he dared not risk a movement that might, unwittingly, advance her purpose.

But for that time, it seemed Shamyris sought nothing, save, as she had said, Basilea's comfort.

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They spoke at first of indifferent things; and throughout these early bows and beckonings, these customary taps and knocks upon the gates of friendship, Shamyris remained gentle, discreet, charming as Tamael had never before known her. It was as though, divining some distaste in her companion for men and gallantry, she was at pains to make the girl forget her manly aspect, the fashion of their encounter, the wonted end of all such intimacies. Soon they talked, in truth, as women talk together. Basilea spoke of Ctesiphon and of her coming thither with her Persian lover. "Why did you quarrel with the man?" Shamyris asked. "Do you hate him?" "No," said Basilea. "Nor love him either. The beginning of the dispute was nothing. Some small matter. I have forgotten. All men weary me after a little while." "That is not strange," said Shamyris. "Commonly they are stupid as well as brutish." Basilea glanced at the princess. "How do you say that?" she asked. "You, who are yourself a man?" "Ah!" said Shamyris, smiling. "But I am different from other men."

They ate the figs, they drank the honey-scented wine. And again Tamael was alarmed. For although the wine did not make Basilea amorous, like Charis, nor foolish, like Kalitta, nor wild, like the women of Chagab's house, it wrought a change in her. The brooding that was in her looks had deepened; her

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speech, which had been rare, was fluent now and reckless. After the constraint of her long silence, she, too, was falling into a dizziness of words.

And Shamyris—with that curiosity she had of every matter of the mind and heart, which led her to explore their secret places with such care, and which made her, once satisfied, so dexterously cruel in their handling—was urging her to speak more freely still. “I once knew a man,” Basilea said, “who was not brutish. He was gentler, I believe, than any woman.” “A simple soul, no doubt,” said Shamyris; and Basilea, staring at her cup, said, “Yes. Though not so simple. His kindness was not blind. He had but little knowledge of this world, yet he knew all that can be known of tenderness.” And Shamyris very compassionately said: “I think, sweet lady, you must have loved that man.” And of a sudden Tamael could not breathe; his belly and his limbs grew weak. For Basilea’s eyes were full of tears and her voice was ardent, sad, heavy with great longing. “Yes, oh! yes,” she said. “It is because of him that all men weary me. I take their riches and their love because I like riches, and because at times I fancy I shall like their love. But always I hate the men, because it is not they but that one man who should give me everything. In truth when I first loved him I did not picture any gifts at all but only kisses——” She laughed a little rueful laugh. “I was

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a silly country girl. I even thought that we might marry and live as other men and women live——”

She stopped. And Tamael experienced a bitterness of pain such as the loss of Heaven had not given him, nor his first condemnation in the sorcerer's chamber, nor his farewell to his beloved. “A fool! A fool!” he wept within his heart. “I am a fool, and all my miseries have been deserved. O Holy Michael! You did well to punish me!” For now, for the first time, he knew Basilea and the nature and the fullness of her love, and he knew himself also, and how his thoughts had sinned against her. He had imagined her an angelic being, chaste as she was lovely; and he had imagined her a frail, wild creature, possessed only of light, fleshly passions, incapable of profound suffering. Whereas in truth she was no different from himself, as loving, and as wretched. It did not concern him, then, to think that knowledge no less than ignorance would have led him to disaster. He was aware only that he had sinned against Basilea and against their love, and that this sin was more grievous than Petronilla's avarice, and Porcellus Galla's lust, and the princess's icy cruelty. And in his shame and self-abasement, he bowed down before the Lord Jehovah, Whose punishments were just.

Basilea spoke again, her eyes bent moodily upon her cup, her voice heavy with remembrance. “I be-

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lieve," she said, "that I could always have been happy with that man. I know that I am changeable and full of greediness, yet where my mind is fixed on any matter and holds it to be good, I think I can forget all other things and love the one thing very obstinately. But it is easy," she added in a different tone, "to pretend to virtue now that my lover has left me." "He left you?" exclaimed Shamyris; and Basilea, raising her head, said: "Yes. He left me as it were upon our wedding night. Left me as pure in fact as he had found me, although less pure, I fear, in spirit. And I have never learnt why he went off so suddenly—unless it was that at the last he knew me for a light woman, or unless——" She hesitated, and then, the warmth of wine and confidence increasing, concluded: "Unless he discovered that I had a devil——"

Shamyris started, gaped in astonishment, stared in delight at this new oddity. And watching her, Tamael ceased to pay heed to his own inner torment and even to Basilea's words, so alarmed had he become at Shamyris's pleasure. "A devil!" she repeated. "What do you mean, you had a devil?" And Basilea answered: "It was said I was possessed by evil spirits, and maybe it was so. Upon the night my lover left me I heard a voice cry out while we were eating supper, my father and I and a holy man who was visiting us and whom I loved. At the time I

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knew no more than the one strange cry, for I was frightened and fell into a faint. But afterwards I was told the voice confessed and swore it was a devil sent to seduce me by a certain wicked Roman merchant." And at this the princess's eyes grew very bright; she smiled her long smile eagerly. And Tamael drove his nails into his hands, and ground his teeth, and writhed with all his body, for he knew that an abominable thought had come into her mind and already he guessed the nature of its subtlest, most atrocious cruelty.

But the princess's curiosity was not yet satisfied; her plan, whatever it might be, was not yet ripe. And so for a time she contained her eagerness, and Tamael contained his wrath, while Basilea, now altogether yielded to the painful comforts of confession, spoke of the night when Cyriacus had rid her of the devil and of the consequences of that night.

It seemed that despite the terrors of her awakening, despite the horrid tale Cyriacus told her, despite the fear of discovery and punishment, she had gone, when all slept, to meet her lover. She told of her vain search: "I waited. It was late and the night was dark, yet I waited I do not know how long. I ran through the garden and the vineyard and all the places that were about my father's house. I even, in my horror and my desperation, called—for oh! I

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wanted him! But he did not come. He never came to me again." And then, in her other, harder tone, she told of the days that followed and how the whole of life was changed. "After that night," she said, "I no longer cared what any person thought of me. Since my lover had not thought me worthy of his love, I valued no man's good opinion. Besides! Had I not been possessed of an evil spirit? Was I not half damned in the world's eyes already?" And Tamael wept and sweated, for Basilea's loss had turned her, not as he had secretly hoped, towards virtue, but towards the worst disorders of her fancy. Half in defiance of her pain, half in lightness, she had given herself to Hylas, to every likely hind and shepherd who had sought her. "I thought that at the least I should find pleasure," she said. "It took me many moons and many lovers to know that even pleasure can be a sour thing." And in a little while, her father discovering her unchastities, she had been thrust out of her home. "That was an evil hour," said Basilea. "My father cursed me—cursed me for a sinful daughter and a bad Christian. And I answered him. I had not thought that curses could be so painful, and there was no one to restrain me or make me sorry or ashamed, for my dear Cyriacus was not in our house at that time. Perhaps if he had been with us our quarrel would have been less cruel—my father might have been less

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harsh, and I less insolent. Many things might have been changed—— But who shall say? And so I went to Antioch and later, as you see, to Ctesiphon.”

She paused and once again stared moodily at her wine-cup. “And what of the merchant?” Shamyris asked. “What of the man who sent the devil to you? Did he get his reward?” A smile that came as near to hatred as any Tamael had seen upon her face, made Basilea’s lips thin. “If you mean the reward of my seduction,” she said, “no. I will give myself to every man on earth, to thieves and murderers and lepers, before I give myself to that man! But he pursues me yet. He sought to carry me away in Antioch. Indeed it was on that account I was so glad to leave the city. For he is very powerful in Syria. All the Emperor’s officers obey him. And it would not be difficult to take a Christian woman. But he will not take me!” “And your first lover?” asked Shamyris. “If you saw him would you desire him still?” And Basilea lifted her head, and though it seemed she looked but at the emptiness before her, it was in fact, by an odd chance, in Tamael’s eyes that her eyes gazed. “I do not know,” she said slowly. “Sometimes I hope that we shall meet again, and sometimes I fear the meeting above all things in the world. A thought I cannot bear is that maybe he is dead, maybe he was killed by some accident upon that terrible night. But I should have heard

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of it." "What was his name?" asked Shamyris. "Tamael," said Basilea. But this time Shamyris spoke no word, gave no sign of her delight. The thing the devil set before her eyes at that moment and the alarm that it caused her, kept her altogether silent.



CHAPTER XVII

BETWEEN Basilea and the princess no more was said, that night, of any consequence. For a short while they lay, each busy with her own thoughts. Then Basilea, made weary by wine and speech and the dull weight of memory, left the dancing-hall; and Shamyris, after she had accompanied her new friend to her lodging and had obtained the promise that they would meet and sup together on the morrow, returned with Tamael to Zapur's palace. In face of the devil's anger she had not dared question the girl further.

But soon her courage and her curiosity revived. "Why did you put that spell on me, Tamael?" she asked when they were come into the palace halls. And Tamael, scarce knowing how to answer her, said: "You sought to learn too much. I feared your indiscretions might lead you into danger." "What danger?" asked Shamyris. And Tamael, confused and stammering, repeated: "Some danger. Some trap—some unknown snare. The girl seems strange and perilous to me. I think a saint has set his mark upon her." And Shamyris said, "Ah!" and pinched her lips and walked in silence, reflecting deeply.

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Presently she spoke again. "I have heard," she said, "that devils can assume the shape of beasts and birds and men. Have you ever taken a man's form, Tamael?" And Tamael said quickly: "No, I have not." And Shamyriss smiled a little and said: "Truly the whole event is odd and puzzling. I had almost thought that you might be the Tamael whom Basilea loved. It is a rare name. If it did not touch you I cannot understand why you suddenly became so angry. Speak the truth, Tamael." And as she said this she made a certain sign, and the devil, taken by surprise, cried out: "Yes! I was Basilea's lover!" And Shamyriss laughed very happily. "I knew it!" she said. "O modest Tamael! O discreet, careful devil! So you would have concealed your naughtiness from me? But this is indeed a lucky turn! I, who had hoped at best to give our lovely lady, who hates men so much, a better lover!" She broke off and laughed again. "But I think you have guessed what was in my mind?" she said. And Tamael answered: "Yes. But you shall not do it." And Shamyriss said: "Why not? She loved you. She loves you still. And you must love her also, else you would not be so bashful. For once it is my pleasure to do a kindly act—to unite two faithful hearts. Most surely I will do it." "You shall not," repeated Tamael. "You know I can prevent you." Whereupon all the

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princess's insolence returned. "Are you so certain?" she said. "At least I can make you appear before her. That will be well-nigh as great a horror as any." "You cannot!" Tamael shouted in an extremity of rage. But Shamyris: "Of what use is anger? You have seen how daily commerce with you has improved my works." And before the devil could speak or move, she made another sign, and behold he was incarnate, wings, blackness, nakedness and all. A slave, who happened to be passing by, screamed and fled away. And Shamyris, herself invisible, proceeded to her chamber. "You see?" she said. And Tamael understood indeed that he would require prudence, quickness, infinite cunning if the princess were to be outwitted. Affecting fear he bowed before her. "Forgive me, Shamyris," he said. "Henceforth in very truth you are the master," and so left her.

But his mind was set as sternly as it had been upon that night when Barshamoth had praised his evil-doing. "Basilea, my Basilea," he whispered tenderly, and then: "Cyriacus! He can help her. He can turn her from her ugly life. Cyriacus must come and unbind my oath to Shamyris and save Basilea!" He was so certain that his beloved's thoughts could be no other than his own, that he did not hesitate upon the nature of his plot. Only the fashion of it needed care. And so he flew slowly

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back and forth over the streets of Ctesiphon, weighing first one means and then another of frustrating the princess's purpose and of bringing Cyriacus to Persia.

At last his plan was fully formed, and with all possible dispatch he flew to the palace of the Prince Sinrabi, him whom Shamyris had made mad so that he went upon his hands and knees, like King Nabukhudurussur of old. He found the prince surrounded by a group of armed attendants—naked and crawling on the ground. And Sinrabi, his eyes being opened and his ears unsealed, saw the devil and fell back upon his haunches and howled; and his attendants, seeing and hearing nothing, cowered in terror. But Tamael went to the prince and touched his forehead and bade him be in peace and listen carefully; and Sinrabi did as he was bidden.

And Tamael said to the prince, "Greetings. You are afflicted by the devil of the Princess Shamyris, daughter of Prince Zapur. If you would be cured, repeat aloud what I am saying." And the prince said, "I am afflicted by the devil of Shamyris, daughter of Zapur"; and the attendants, their master being somewhat quieted, drew near and listened to his words. "If you would be free from torment," Tamael said again, "and if you would rid Persia of a great evil, you must send messengers secretly

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to Prince Zapur." "I will send messengers secretly to Zapur," said Sinrabi. "To tell him," continued Tamael, "of his daughter's sorceries and to bid him bring hither Cyriacus of Antioch. Only Cyriacus can cure your sufferings and save your country from the witch. This very night she will be in Chagab's house, plotting new mischief. Her father must go to that place and take her and compel her to confess her wickedness. And Cyriacus will do the rest." And Prince Sinrabi heard the devil and repeated his words exactly; and the attendants in their turn heard and marveled. When Tamael had given instructions how Shamyris should be taken, the hour and the precise manner of her capture, and how she was to be restrained until the coming of the good man Cyriacus, he turned away; and Prince Sinrabi rose from the ground and bade his slaves wrap him in a mantle and wash his feet, for a measure of his madness was removed from him. Yet there was a strange brightness in his eyes; and the slaves, observing it, murmured among themselves, saying: "He is like the wild men of the desert. A strange soul has come into his body." And Tamael flew back to Shamyris.

Throughout that day he watched beside her bed, and throughout that day his hatred burned strong and fierce as it had burned before Barshamoth in

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Philondas' garden. Upon the last consequences of his plan he did not care to think, lest the vision of his dearest hope, of Basilea reconciled to Cyriacus and to virtue, of Basilea lost to his sight, this time forever, should subdue his courage. But on the princess's surprise, her rage, her loss, her pain, he dwelt with considerable pleasure. For she could not escape, he told himself; her cunning, her wickedness, her spells would not avail against Sinrabi's knowledge, against Cyriacus the good man's power. All that he needed for the full success of his adventure was sufficient time, sufficient leisure in which to set his trap and so catch Shamyris unawares. And here, he guessed, her very wickedness would serve him. "Noble mistress," he asked of her when presently evening came and she awoke; "is it your wish that I should appear before the girl to-night?" Shamyris shook her head. "No," she said, "not unless you, my Tamael, try some naughty trick upon me. Haste would be unseemly. Moreover, it would destroy half my enjoyment. You know that the approach to pleasure is my chief joy. No satisfaction is as keen, as sweet, as the anticipation of it." Tamael bowed before her. "All things shall be done according to your will," he said, and with every show of meekness, followed her to Chagab's house.

The dancing-hall was, as ever, noisy, hot and

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heavy-smelling. In the curtained recess where Tamael and Shamyris awaited Basilea, bowls of snow and a profusion of white flowers made an unusual freshness. But already the flowers drooped, the snow melted. Not far from the recess two men stood and talked with the owner of the hall, the long-haired Jew Chagab. And Tamael was stirred and gladdened, for he knew from a certain stiffness the men had, from the look of their soft robes, which seemed to hang uneasily upon their shoulders, that they were guards disguised; and he knew also, from his companion's comfortable air, that she had not seen the men, or seeing them, had felt no fear, secure in the knowledge that Tamael's powers kept her invisible from all her enemies. "In a little while Zapur will come!" Tamael thought. But a moment later his content was rudely broken. At a table near the doorway lay a man dressed in the Roman manner, thick of body and gross of feature. His big head hung forward like a bull's when it first scents the heifer; his protruding eyes were fixed upon the door. And Tamael, flooded with hateful memories of Antioch, of the road beside Philondas' house, of Arnaphas the sorcerer's chamber, recognized Porcellus Galla.

Before he had leisure to reflect upon this new accident, Basilea appeared. She was dressed in a white gown; a slave walked behind her, carrying

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a cloak, a mirror, a jar of perfume. The merchant rose and greeted her. "So I have found you, Basilea," he said. And Basilea paused and looked at him, and her eyes grew wide and a little staring. Otherwise she showed neither apprehension nor dismay; it seemed her courage was armed, in all places and at all seasons, to meet Porcellus. "That is not strange," she said, her voice weary, as though surfeited with the repeating of familiar words. "That is not strange. But here or elsewhere I have no wish to speak with you. So farewell again, Porcellus." And she took a step away from him, making as if the encounter were concluded. And Tamael, who with Shamyris had come out of the recess to greet her, saw her smile the same hard smile that talk of Porcellus had brought upon her lips the night before. This acidity of hate, this bitter obstinacy, the devil thought, was the gift of her new life—his gift. Glad as he was that she should hate Porcellus, the notion that he, Tamael, by the withdrawal of his love, had thus chilled her, had mixed his harshness with her gentle temper, was like a whip across his loins.

Her smile, her words, the presence, no doubt, of the supposed Prince Iddin, enraged Porcellus. Hitherto his attitude had been respectful, even humble. Now his face flushed; his bulging eyes glared at Basilea. He caught her arm. "Listen to me," he

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said; and at once the girl turned on him, and so fiercely that his hand dropped and he started backward. Freed, Basilea checked her first, furious impulse. But her anger, for being colder, was no less keen; her look was the look of one who is resolved to rid himself, now and forever, of an intolerable irritation. "I will hear you, Porcellus," she said. "For in truth, since you insist so much, there are things that I, also, would say to you." So they faced each other. And Porcellus said: "You are foolish, Basilea, to defy me. Do you not know how much stronger I am than you?" And Basilea said: "No, I do not. I have friends now, and wealth. I have no fear of you." And Porcellus repeated: "You are foolish. Even here in Persia I could do you great harm." Whereupon Basilea laughed and put her hand to the bosom of her gown, and drew from it a knife which, still laughing, she pointed lightly and as it were mockingly at her breast. "Not so much harm as this can do," she said. "Yet I will use it, Porcellus, if you attempt to seize me. Make no doubt of that! If I loved life so much that an eternity of Hell would not be too big a price to pay for it, I should yet enjoy to die to spite you!" And at this it seemed that Porcellus was shaken. He stared at the knife, at Basilea's smiling, furious face, and there was fear in his eyes as well as admiration and the unwilling, sullen glow of an increased desire. "How you hate

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me!" he said. "I, who would have given you everything a man can give—— Why do you hate me so, Basilea?" And Basilea answered, in the jesting tone that she had used to mock at self-destruction: "I hate you because you are old and ugly. And I hate you because you did a thing to me that was, perhaps, the cause of all my sorrow." And with that she left him, and taking the princess's arm, went into the recess. And Porcellus departed, his head lowered, his hands clenched. In that place of broils and separations no one heeded him.

Lying on the cushions, Basilea bathed her hands and scented them, took her mirror from the slave and began to rearrange her hair. "That was frank speaking," said Shamyris. "Surely you are rid of the man now." "I do not think so," said Basilea. "He is the Roman that I told you of—my most persistent wooer. But I believe he loves my hatred above all things in me! For the time he is frightened. I have never spoken my mind to him so plainly. But he will return. He will trouble and pursue me until my life in Persia is made intolerable." Shamyris assumed an air of deep concern. "That should not be," she said. "You must allow some other man, some other lover to protect you." And Basilea spread a little powder on her lips and said: "I shall seek another man in every case. It is not true that I have many friends or much

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wealth." "But you will let me help you, will you not?" said Shamyris. And Basilea, still holding the mirror, glanced at the princess. "No," she said. "You must not take it ill, prince, but I would not let you help me unless you were my lover. And—it is strange—I do not wish you to be that, and I do not think you wish it either." And Tamael, torn by a new and very cruel pain, torn by impatience, anxiety, alarm, yet marveled at the wisdom of Basilea. With the same clearness, he thought unhappily, she in the past had judged his love for her, his speech, his reticence, his fear of Philondas. Even as she knew now that the Prince Iddin's liking was without desire, so had she known then that Tamael's passion was a timorous, furtive thing, afraid to affront the common light, to assume the common duties of mankind. Yet she had trusted him! And once again, in that last moment of suspense, while Basilea and Shamyris talked and drank together, and Prince Zapur's spies whispered with the Jew Chagab, Tamael wept in remorse and jealousy and self-contempt, thinking of Basilea's love and of how, because he had sought to slay it and to save her soul, she would soon, maybe, take yet another step towards damnation.

He was still racked with contemplation of this odious image, of Basilea caressing and caressed by yet another lover, when Prince Zapur appeared.

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Following him were a number of armed guards, and with him, to Tamael's astonishment, was Sinrabi, clad in a long, black mantle such as pilgrims wear, his face foul with uncut hair, his eyes shining very brightly. It seemed that the mad prince had made himself the leader of the party, for directly he came into the hall he leaped forward, stretched out his arms and gave a shout that caused all the people to turn their heads and brought Chagab and the two spies running to the doorway. And at once Tamael lifted the blindness that was upon Prince Zapur's eyes and upon the eyes of his guards, so that they, looking about them, should see Shamyris and recognize her. Then he withdrew hastily into the darkest shadows of the curtains. He had not thought that Sinrabi would come in person to effect the witch's capture, and he feared that the madman, catching sight of the devil's naked body, might reveal its presence to Basilea.

Shamyris, lying in the opening of the recess, suspected nothing of his treachery. At the appearance of Sinrabi and her father, she had uttered an exclamation of surprise. Basilea, too, was much astonished. "What a strange being!" she said, and with all the people leaned forward and stared at the mad prince, his black, pilgrim's cloak, his menacing attitude, his eyes that gazed wildly over the hall, seeking their enemy. But Shamyris, trusting to the

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devil's spells, said no word of alarm, gave no warning to Basilea. And so it happened that when Sinrabi's glance fell upon the recess and he came bounding towards it with Zapur and his guards, the princess and Basilea remained altogether still, stiffened and made dumb by utter amazement. "The witch! The witch!" cried Sinrabi. "The plague of Ctesiphon! The leper of Persia!" And in a moment a net was cast over the head of Shamyris, a scarf was flung across her lips, she was bound more securely, as Tamael observed with great content, than ever Mikkon was bound in his tank of lampreys.

Basilea, surprised and bewildered, watched the struggle. The suddenness, the swiftness of the attack, it seemed, so shocked her that the notion of escape did not come into her mind. While Shamyris writhed in her father's arms, while Sinrabi leaped and danced, and the people who were in the hall pushed and jostled one another in their endeavor to behold the scene, Basilea crouched among the tossed cushions, the scattered cups and dishes and flowers. Beside her, half covered by the curtain, stood Tamael. He was so near to his beloved that he could breathe the perfume of her skin and hair, and feel, against his leg, the roundness of her shoulder.

She had not moved when Zapur, having done with gagging and with trussing up his daughter, signed

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to the chief of his guards. "Take the girl," he said. "Maybe she is a witch also." And at this indeed Basilea jumped to her feet and made as though to run out of the recess. And Tamael, distraught with terror, sprang from behind the curtain. Forgetting that to all save Sinrabi he was less than a shadow against shadows, forgetting that to Sinrabi he was a clear and terrible vision—black no doubt, perhaps with horns and claws and beak, as he had been to Petronilla—he stood in the center of the recess, his hands raised in a very threatening gesture, his outstretched wings covering Basilea. And there, as the guards laid hands on the girl's arms to seize her, Sinrabi saw him, and of a sudden uttered a great cry and flung himself down upon the ground. But the words he spoke were more astounding than all his former madness. "Bow down! Bow down!" he cried. "Behold the good spirit, the holy angel who warned me of the witch!" And the guards, thinking he spoke of Basilea, stepped back, released the girl. And Tamael crept again into the folds of the curtain, praising the happy chance that made him choose, among the princess's many victims, the mad Sinrabi for his mouthpiece.

So Basilea went safely from the recess and from the hall; and Tamael saw that she, too, went in profound amazement as well as in confusion and alarm. Once she glanced backward, but Tamael

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could not say whether it was the helpless figure of Shamyris that her eyes sought, or the unknown spirit whose presence had so miraculously saved her. She disappeared; and the guards lifted Shamyris up, and with Zapur and Sinrabi, prepared to leave the hall likewise. And Tamael followed secretly after them. "Who is the girl?" Zapur asked of the Jew Chagab. "I do not know, my lord," the Jew replied. "She is a newcomer here." By the street door a messenger on horseback waited. Prince Zapur waved his hand, and the man rode instantly away—to Antioch, as Tamael knew, and Cyriacus. The sound of his horse's hoofs on the stone pavement was like the beating of a drum that calls to battle, like the loud beating of Tamael's heart that throbbed in hope and terror of the good man's coming.



CHAPTER XVIII

SO Shamyris was taken and carried to the tower chamber. And there the work that Tamael, by the mouth of the mad Sinrabi, had bidden Zapur do, was done. The thing the witch had hidden was brought forth, and the things that she had laid aside, and all the lesser instruments of her abominations. And these things were set about Shamyris; and Zapur, after he had prayed to the Lord, burned them. And Shamyris, lying within the circle, feeling its heat, breathing its fatty odors, writhed and wept, and at the last, when all was consumed and the scarf was removed from her lips, confessed. Yet she confessed without repentance. Even while the flames licked her feet and singed her hair, her eyes were full of hatred and of rage. She stared at Prince Zapur so furiously that he, for shame at having fathered such a monster, turned his head away; she stared at Sinrabi until the mad prince ran from the room, crying, "Cyriacus! Cyriacus!" Even as her evil powers fell from her one by one, her staring looks strove in a last desperate attempt to recall the devil who had betrayed her and who,

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although unseen, unheard and no longer subject to her will, was yet, she knew, bound to her.

But the devil made no answer. Neither then nor later when she was carried to her father's dungeons and confined there, chained, with two slaves to give her food and two guards to watch her—at no time, in fact, after her confession, did Tamael speak with Shamyris. He too had suffered grievously during the destruction of the hidden thing. For the thing was of the very stuff of evil, and in its burning Tamael's devil's body burned likewise. To increase his anguish, while the flames leaped, and the smoke made a foul, stinking darkness in the chamber, and Shamyris shrieked as the damned shriek in Hell, a face had suddenly appeared before him—black and hard-looking as iron, with stern, glowing eyes—and a voice had spoken to him out of that awful face. "Tamael," said the voice, "you have deceived me twice. For this you shall return to Hell and roast in its fires, as you are roasting now, forever." The words did not astonish Tamael. He had not supposed his treachery would pass unheeded; he had foreseen both discovery and punishment. And in truth he did not greatly care—so Basilea was made safe—what would befall him after he left Shamyris. Yet the prospect of eternal pain was very terrible.

Thus it happened, during the days that followed,

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while he and all the palace waited the coming of the good man Cyriacus, that Tamael was not concerned with Shamyris, her tears and her reproaches. These were his last days on earth, the last when he would look upon the sunshine and the rain, the light, the darkness and Basilea. And so, being free to come and go, now, well-nigh as he pleased, and judging that at such a time a measure of license would not be unseemly, he spent the chief part of his days with his beloved, seeking, in the spectacle of her beauty, of her sweetness, a solace for his approaching miseries, a hope that this suffering would not be endured in vain.

As the hours passed and Tamael lingered invisibly in Basilea's chamber, he found, indeed, something of the comfort he had sought. For Basilea, after the night of the princess's capture, appeared in a manner changed. She had gone from Chagab's house in fear and amazement; deeply wondering, she had looked back at the place where Sinrabi bowed before the unknown angel. And on the morrow, when Tamael, scarred and wearied, dragged himself to her lodging, that look of awe was still upon her face.

She was alone. Before the house, a host of young men passed and repassed, knocked at the closed door, strove to enter. They were come, laden with gifts, to behold the companion of the witch, the woman

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whom the mad Sinrabi had worshiped as a holy spirit. With them were older men, making less clamor but bearing richer presents, and priests of the god Ahura Mazda, whose faith, no doubt, was curious of the miracle. Tamael, on his way to his beloved, saw the Persian who had been her lover pause and hang a garland of roses on the door. Porcellus, too, drove thither in his finest coach, but at the sight of the assembled youths, turned angrily away. It seemed that a stream of desire, born of her strange adventure, flowed towards Basilea from every quarter of the town and broke at her feet in a profusion of gold and jewels and wreaths of flowers. But she was wholly careless of it. She remained as heedless of the agitation she had caused as of the invisible lover who had crept into her chamber that dark day to watch and dream upon her solitude.

She sat motionless, her hands clasped, her head a trifle bent, her eyes gazing before her. Her looks had not the wildness of distress that Tamael had seen in them beside the pool, the day young Hylas kissed her. Yet there was sadness in their brooding. They were grave, and dark with a profound perplexity, as though, in the scales of some unforeseen and puzzling circumstance, she weighed her thoughts and found them wanting. Presently she rose and went to a coffer that was standing by, and took from it a small clay figure, rudely fashioned

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and painted in bright colors. It had the likeness of a youth, clad in short robes and carrying a lamb upon his shoulders; and Tamael knew it for the image which the Christians say is of the Lord Jesus and the heathen say is of their singer Orpheus. For a while Basilea held the figure in her hand, and still her looks were grave, puzzled and a little sad. Then she returned to her seat, which was by the window of the chamber, and sitting herself down, fell again into her reverie. Tamael crouched beside her. His body was so burnt, so maimed, his heart so heavy, that he did not scruple on this occasion to lay his head upon her knee and—for the first time unknown to her—to let it rest there peacefully.

So it was the next day and the next, and on every further day after the princess's capture. The young men continued to assemble before Basilea's door—although in smaller numbers—and the old men, with their costly wreaths and presents. But Basilea saw no one of them. She remained alone, save for the slaves who bathed and dressed her, who bought her food and cooked and served it. And presently the slaves also were taken from her. The keeper of her lodging sold them, together with the finest of her jewels; for she was becoming poor, and could not pay the cost of her great chamber, its vast silken bed, its baths and patterned hangings. On the same day Porcellus again visited her lodg-

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ing, and finding the door unguarded, the slaves dismissed, the keeper of the house absent, strode boldly in upon her. His air was arrogant. Without greeting or apology, he came to where Basilea sat—with Tamael as ever invisibly beside her—and stood and smiled at her most insolently. And she, unmoved it seemed by the intrusion, smiled no less insolently at Porcellus. It was a singular thing, Tamael thought, that these two, who knew so little of each other, should be as intimate, as familiar in their hate as lovers are in love.

Their speech was simpler, franker than the speech of lovers. "I think," said Porcellus, "that I shall not now have long to wait, Basilea, before I get you." And Basilea said: "You are mistaken, Porcellus. You will have to wait forever." And Porcellus said: "Oh! no, Basilea. That is not possible. I have heard—the whole town speaks of it—that you are grown chaste, that you refuse both love and gifts. But a whore without riches is a sorry thing. What will you do, where will you go to escape me, when all your jewels are sold and you are driven from your lodging?" And Basilea answered: "When that happens, I shall return to Syria and marry the herdsman who was my first lover. Or I shall go among the holy women of the desert, to serve and labor with them. May I not do as other whores have done?" And still she smiled at Porcellus, mocking

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him, so that Tamael could not tell if she spoke truly or in jest.

And once again the merchant was enraged. He had come that day, as Tamael divined, not to offer violence but only to frighten and to taunt Basilea. But in face of her contempt, his resolution weakened. Always, it seemed, his desire for her was so closely linked with hate that where the one failed the other must needs seek, in sneers and threats and angry gestures, its furious consummation. "So it is true," he said, "what they say of you in the city—that you are turned saint? Because a madman raved before your pretty face you fancy you are protected by a holy angel—you fancy, maybe, that you are become an angel?" He laughed. And Tamael, knowing that rage and heated blood can choke a man, went and stood beside him. For Porcellus stared at Basilea, unmoved and smiling in her chair, and his eyes were heavy; he spoke, and his dark cheeks grew darker, the veins swelled upon his neck and forehead. "Let me give you warning," he said. "For a little while you will be safe in Ctesiphon. The people think, as you do, that you are in a manner holy. But their folly will not endure forever. Soon it will die, and you will remain alone and poor and helpless. For the last time I say to you—if you do not come to me I will do you great harm. You will suffer a more painful death than

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any knife can give. I will tell the people that a devil has possessed you. I will tell the people that you are yourself a——”

But here Porcellus stopped. A darkness had come before his eyes, a dense black cloud that pressed upon his senses, making him blind and deaf and speechless. He gasped, put up his hands, staggered backward. Basilea rose. “You speak foolishness,” she said. “Your anger makes you mad. I tell you that I will live, if I please, in the desert, among the holy women. There is not a man in Ctesiphon who would not gladly lead me thither. Go now. I think that you are ill.” And indeed it was plain that Porcellus, for that time, was grievously stricken. The cloud that Tamael had set before his eyes had thinned, so that he could see Basilea. His lips moved and his legs carried him. But he was very much afraid. “Oh! I am old!” he said, and so went from the chamber.

Basilea remained motionless, staring at the door by which he had left her. But it seemed she was no longer thinking of Porcellus, his threats, his sickness, his hate or anything concerning him. Her eyes were full of tears; she smiled, like one who looks upon the memory of dead happiness. And Tamael also remembered Antioch and their escape, the sweet, warm night through which they walked, the quiet that fell upon them. He ran to her, em-

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braced her closely. Between distress and love he did not ask himself at that moment whether she could hear his voice or feel his arms about her. "Oh! my dear, my dear——" he said. And Basilea ceased to weep. She stood there smiling; and now it was as though she dreamed that something that was dead had come to life again.

In this way the days passed, the little hours that Tamael cherished with such desperate joy, striving to make of them an enduring charm, a talisman that would abide with him throughout eternity. And at last Cyriacus came, and they were over.

The good man reached Prince Zapur's palace at dawn. Everything was quiet. The halls and courtyards were empty; the prince and his household slept, for they had not thought that Cyriacus would arrive that day, nor for many days to come. Tamael, lying in the princess's cell, heard the clatter of the hoofs, the cries of the sentinels, the sound of quick footsteps, and wondered—half in anguish, half in hopefulness—was it a divine hand had led the saint so swiftly through the valleys, had turned his horses from the swamps and miry places, had withheld the stones that trip, the floods that grasp and bind the feet, dragging men down into a net of waters? And his heart was sore, for he had not bidden farewell to his beloved. Yet he praised the Lord, for

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Basilea was alone and poor and unprotected, even as Porcellus said, and it was well that Cyriacus should be with her speedily.

So Tamael lifted up his head and spread his wings and prepared to meet the man of God. And in the evening of that day, after Cyriacus had rested from his journey, Prince Zapur and his guards carried Shamyris to the chamber where the good man was and where all things had been made ready for the ceremony. And Tamael, following the princess, came into the chamber also. And he was not afraid. The sight of the candles and the cup, of the bowed figures of Prince Zapur's Christian household, the sight of the holy man whom he had brought to Ctesiphon to save Basilea, filled him with exultation, so that he walked to his place behind the kneeling Shamyris as proudly as ever the archangels walked upon the terraces of Heaven, and stood there, his head raised, his wings outstretched, as joyfully as ever Lucifer stood before the Throne of God in the days when the Lord loved him. "Hail, Cyriacus!" he cried. "Behold the devil Tamael!"—and so made himself visible to the saint and to all who were in the chamber.

The people were astonished. Hearing Tamael's cry, seeing his nakedness, some groaned and fell upon the ground, others screamed, while others again, emboldened by the good man's presence,

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murmured indignantly among themselves, saying, "Here is a very evil, insolent devil." But Cyriacus, by a gesture of his right hand, silenced them. His eyes scanned Tamael's face; as yet he had not made the first sign nor uttered the first word of his holy office. "This is a strange thing," he said, and then more briskly to Prince Zapur—"Go! Leave me. I would be alone with the girl and with this devil." And Prince Zapur and his priests and his soldiers and his slaves left the chamber. And Tamael remained, erect and full of pride, before the good man Cyriacus.

And the saint said to the devil: "Tamael, I am come to Persia to take you from this woman. Your sins and hers are numerous as locusts. They are noisy as the croaking of a thousand ravens. They stink like rotting fish in the nostrils of Heaven. Yet you, who should be sorry to depart, are glad. Your face is joyful. You cry to me in a proud voice. What is the meaning of this happiness?" And Tamael, knowing that his time was come, said quickly: "I am happy, holy man, because now that you are here, the child you loved, Basilea, daughter of Philondas, will leave her evil ways and will go presently to Paradise." And Cyriacus gave a great start and said: "Basilea? Is she in Ctesiphon?" And Tamael said: "Yes, holy man. She is alone and full of sorrow. Already she is weary of her life

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—of men and gold and wickedness. She weeps and dreams of the peace that solitude and abstinence will give. If you but go to her and take her hand, she will be saved.” And Cyriacus looked at Tamael keenly. “How do you know this?” he asked. And Tamael, returning the good man’s look, answered, “Because I love her also”; and they fell silent, gazing at one another.

So they stood in the silence of the chamber. Beside them the candles burned, the incense gave forth a pleasant smell; at their feet Shamyris knelt, her hands and feet bound, a handkerchief across her lips, to keep her rage from uttering blasphemy. And presently Cyriacus said: “In truth this is a singular, mysterious matter. Tell me, Tamael, of yourself and of your love, and of how the whole event has come about.” And Tamael told him. But now his pride, his joyfulness were gone. The moment which he had awaited with such dreadful ardor was passed; his heart was dull, his mind empty of reflection. He spoke of Basilea, of the perils and the sorrows that encompassed her; he spoke of Shamyris and of the plot he had contrived to defeat her sinfulness; he spoke of his own pains and fears; and then, one word leading to another, he spoke of his past life in Hell and Heaven, and of how he had fallen, through foolishness and ignorance, from the sunshine of Paradise into the dark pits of

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sin. Thus it happened that he made full confession to the saint of everything that he had thought and felt and done from the moment he first looked on Lucifer in love and reverence to the present day. Yet still his senses were benumbed, so that he did not see the changes that his words brought upon the good man's face, nor heed the tone in which, at the conclusion of his tale, the saint questioned him. "And so," said Cyriacus, "the sins you have committed were chiefly of this woman's making?" "Yes," said Tamael. "And when I have released you from her," said Cyriacus, "you will return to Hell to suffer in its fires forever?" "Yes," said Tamael. And again they fell silent. The candles upon the altar were burned low; on the ground Shamyris lay as though in sleep, her eyes closed, her cheeks deathly pale.

At last the good man lifted up his voice. "There is but one thing to do," he said, "and I will do it. Kneel down, Tamael. I will commune with the Lord. In this way all will be made clear and orderly." And Tamael did as he was bidden. And the saint also bowed himself before the Lord and prayed.

And while Cyriacus prayed a strange thing happened to Tamael. He dreamed, and in his dream he thought he was returned to Heaven. He saw the golden terraces, the groves of lilies and of roses; he saw the holy citadel, and behold the door was

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open and a great number of angels were passing in and out of it. Presently pale Gabriel himself stepped forth—he who is chief among the Lord's scholars—and with him was Michael with his flaming sword, and the two were disputing together very earnestly. But Tamael did not hear their words, for at that moment he was seized and flung once more over the battlements of Heaven. Again he fell and fell, through worlds of light and worlds of pitchy blackness, and pain was in his body and fear was in his soul. And as he fell a sound struck upon his ears—a sound that he had never heard yet seemed to recognize—a sound so awful that his spirit quaked, as though he looked, of a sudden, upon the unknown Face of the Almighty. And when the sound ceased he found himself standing before Cyriacus, and his skin was white and his wings were gone from him and he was a man.

For a space he did not move. Cyriacus still knelt upon the ground, his body bent, his face hidden. Slowly the good man raised his head, lowered his hands. Troubled, dim with fear, his eyes sought Tamael's eyes. He looked; and instantly a great joy came upon him and a great pride. He rose. Shamyris also stirred, waking from her trance. On the altar the candles and the censers were extinguished. The chamber was filled with pale, slanting sunshine, for it was morning.

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Tamael sprang forward. "Father! Father!" he cried. "I am a man! Why have you done this thing?" And Cyriacus smiled and said: "I have done it, my son, because it has been revealed to me that the girl Basilea was not born to saintliness. It seems you love her. So I prayed to the Lord, beseeching Him, if He pleased, to make you into a man, that you might marry Basilea and live with her as it is ordained that men should live, and so that you might presently, if you endure together in long-suffering and tenderness and constancy, earn for yourself and her the wonders of eternal salvation." And Tamael, hearing these words, flung himself down before the saint and embraced his knees and wept and kissed him, babbling vague things.

So he remained for a considerable time. At last the good man lifted him up. "Come, Tamael," he said. "Time passes. We must go from this place." And Tamael rose to his feet, and he was altogether naked. And Cyriacus unbound the princess and bade her bring her father to the chamber. And when Prince Zapur was come, the good man asked of him clothes for Tamael and money, that they might depart safely and at ease from Ctesiphon. And Prince Zapur said: "Here is a most unusual miracle!" But seeing the look of fear and awe that was on his daughter's face, he was well content, and gave a tunic and a cloak to Tamael and a purse

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of money. And Tamael dressed himself and went forth with Cyriacus into the streets of the city. And in the same hour the mad Sinrabi was cured of his ravings and became converted to the Christian faith—he and all his people and every man who heard of the miracle.

But Cyriacus and the man Tamael knew nothing of these matters. They went quickly, hurrying towards the lodging of Basilea. And Tamael said: "Tell me, father. If I had confessed myself to you in Syria, would you have prayed to the Lord? Would you have made me then into a man?" And Cyriacus answered: "I cannot say, my son. No doubt, since you did not seek this thing, it could not have happened—your time was not yet come. For man, who is bound at all times by the Will of God, is bound also by the will that is within him. Truly has it been said, that even as a spider spins its web out of its body, so does a man spin his fate out of his head and of his heart and of his loins. Yet God knows all." And Tamael said further: "Good Cyriacus. When we meet again, Basilea will be mightily astonished. Am I to tell her that I have been with her in Ctesiphon? Am I to tell her that I was a devil?" And Cyriacus glanced about him and pinched his lips and put his fingers to his beard. "No," he said presently, "—no. I do not think that would be a virtuous action. Say to her, rather,

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that you were seized by robbers—say that you have spent this time of separation in captivity. Your scars will bear you witness. As for the memory of your past wickedness—keep it on your conscience, for humility's sake.”

Conversing in this way they came to Basilea's lodging. But when they inquired of her from the keeper of the house, they learned that she had left the city. “She went secretly,” the man said. “But if you give me money I will help you find her. For I followed her and know the road.” And Tamael gave the man a gold piece; and he told them that Basilea, in the darkest hour of the night, had joined a certain Christian caravan and had ridden away with it to Antioch. And Tamael, remembering Porcellus, asked: “Why did you follow her?” And the man answered even as Tamael feared: “Because I was paid to discover everything she did and everything that befell her. And I was paid also,” he added, turning to go again into the house, “to tell no one of the girl's whereabouts. But I shall not suffer for my babbling. The man who paid me is gone after her to Antioch.”

CHAPTER XIX

SO Tamael and Cyriacus bought horses and went from Ctesiphon very swiftly, taking the road the holy man had taken on his outward journey. By day they traveled, and by night they rested in the taverns and the shelters that were beside the way. And as they rode the saint spoke of many comfortable things, of the life that Tamael would lead after he had married Basilea, and of work that he would do, and the delight that he would find in every manly, Christian business. And Tamael heard the good man's words with joy. Cyriacus spoke also, from time to time, of more pious and more difficult matters: as for example, of the condition of those members of the Christian Church who had renounced their faith rather than suffer martyrdom, or again of the horrid case of those other professed Christians who denied the consubstantiality of the Holy Three, following the heresies of Arius and Sabellius and Paul of Samosata. And always, when the conversation ran in this vein, Tamael knew that yet a further thought was in the good man's heart and that, beneath his talk of Heavenly awards and earthly backslidings, he longed

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to question Tamael and to learn from him of the terrible and delicious truths of Hell and Paradise. But in fact Cyriacus asked no questions; he made no reference at all to Tamael's knowledge or to anything that touched on his past state. It seemed he feared, despite his strong desire, to dwell upon so great a mystery. And Tamael was grateful to the good man for his discretion. He could not give his mind at that time to reminiscence or to revelation. His concern was with the ground beneath his horse's feet, its nature and its accidents. For Basilea and Porcellus would be alone in Antioch; and the way was long; and Cyriacus was an old man.

But the Lord was with them, and presently they came to Antioch. Straightway they went to the inn that was on the river bank and asked of its host if Basilea the daughter of Philondas was there. And the host of the inn kissed the hem of the saint's robe and answered: "Yes, she arrived an hour since." And of a sudden the hardness that was in Tamael's bosom melted; his limbs moved with a new ease; his heart rode proudly on his happy breath. Here was the window that had been overhung with leaves and dark blue flowers; here was the door by which he had lain and listened to the priest's first, awful invocation; here was the chamber that had been Basilea's; and here, sitting alone within the chamber, was Basilea.

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In that joyful moment Tamael had but one impulse, which was to run instantly to his beloved and to seize and hold her even as he had held her on the night when she had bidden him wait awhile in Philondas' garden. Yet he did not do so. At the sight of the two men, Basilea had started up. Recognizing Cyriacus she took a quick step forward; recognizing Tamael, she stopped. And Tamael stopped likewise, and stood beside the door, for he had not forgotten the words that she had spoken in Ctesiphon, the doubts, the fears that had encompassed her, the waste of bitter thoughts that parting had set between her and her lover. The chill of that cold wilderness was on her now. She looked from Tamael to the good man Cyriacus; she trembled, clasped her hands. Yet her voice was stern: "What does this mean?" she asked. "Why are you returned? Why have you brought him to me, father, now that it is too late?"

But Cyriacus went to her and put his hands upon her and kissed her. "Since you are safe, my daughter," he said, "there can be no talk of lateness. This youth loves you—I think that you love him. Listen, and I will tell you all that you need know concerning him and his return. For already he knows everything of you, and in this manner there will be no darkness or mystery between you." And before Basilea could reply, he fell to relating the tale that

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he had bidden Tamael tell, the false tale of Tamael's capture, and of how, being in Philondas' garden, he was taken by thieves and carried to a far country and sold there for a slave, and of how, when he sought to escape and to return to Syria, he was cast into prison and so remained in anguish and misery until the hour—which was a recent hour—when Cyriacus, chancing to visit the prison, delivered him and brought him again to Antioch. "So he comes before you, my daughter," said the saint, "—sorrowful and sinful even as you are. For he, in the past, has offended very grievously, first against his father and then against you. Yet his suffering has been greater than your suffering."

Thus spake the good man Cyriacus. And Tamael and Basilea heard him but said no word. Their eyes were upon each other. And Cyriacus, when he had seen them, turned away. "I go," he said, "to prepare all things for your marriage. Come you to me presently, that I may hear you and wash your souls clean and make you ready to stand before the Lord." So he departed. The door closed and silence fell upon the chamber.

And now Tamael and Basilea, being alone, went to each other. They moved unsteadily as though they walked in some dark place, and their eyes were dazed, as though, in the midst of darkness, they looked upon a bright light. And when Basilea

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reached her lover she stumbled and so fell into his arms and lay there, like one swooning. And Tamael held her; and he was weak and mindless also, having no sense save in his arms and lips that knew that his beloved was returned to him.

After a little Basilea stirred. She raised her head and put her hands to Tamael's face, touching his cheeks, his eyes, his forehead. "So it is true, my Tamael," she said, "that you are here and that you love me——" And Tamael, waking from his stupor, tightened his arms about her. He would have kissed her then, for he was delivered from every pain and from every terror. But her wondering, frightened eyes withheld him, and her voice, which seemed to come to him from a great distance. Their bodies were together, all enclosed once more in ease and in security. But Basilea still wandered in the cold waste that time and bitterness had made for her. "Basilea!" said Tamael.

And suddenly she broke into a passion of tears and frenzied words and sobbing. "O Tamael, my Tamael," she cried. "How I have wept for you! The sun was black because you were not by me—the earth was turned to air and emptiness—it fell away beneath my feet—because our love was dead! Each day I wept—each night I beat my head and cried out, Tamael! Tamael!—O weariness! There was no life in all the world, no truth in Heaven or in

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Hell, no substance anywhere, because my Tamael was gone from me!" She wept; and Tamael, weeping also, sought to caress and comfort her. But it seemed she did not heed him. Her head was sunk upon his breast; her face was hidden. "O Tamael," she wept. "O my beloved! Would I had known—would I had known love was so great a thing! I knew it, yet I did not know it— And now my soul is black with greed and wantonness and cruelty—there is no virtue in me, no faith, no grace, save that I love you! In all these long days I have not knelt before the Lord. I would not pray to Him Who had forbidden me to love and to be happy. Yet sometimes I have prayed to you, Tamael. For of all men you were the only man worthy to be called a son of God. When I had sinned and suffered for my sin—when loneliness and hate and rage became too heavy to be borne—then I prayed to you, Tamael, to give me of your gentleness. Almost I forgave the world its cruelty, for your sake. And I have prayed to you also for forgiveness. You alone were kind and pitiful— You alone would have forgiven me the wrong that I had done to you—" She paused and looked up at Tamael. Her tears, her sobbing ceased; she no longer cowered and trembled; and now her eyes, that gazed into her lover's, shone with a brightness that was like the brightness that had been in Satan's eyes when he

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was beautiful and in Paradise. And Tamael was full of wonder, for indeed Basilea's pride shone clear and joyful, freer, more beautiful than Satan's. Tamael,"she cried, "I will pray now to the Lord. He will forgive me if He chooses. But I say to you, that even now when my sins are grown so foul that all the Lord's mercy can scarce keep me from damnation, I would refuse His pity, I would refuse His love, if you did not love me."

So Basilea greeted her lover, so, out of the coldness of her pain, she ran to him. And when she ceased speaking and they kissed, it was as though they sprang together into a great light.

On the same day, after Tamael was baptized and purified and Basilea was absolved of her unchastities, the good man Cyriacus joined them in marriage. And all that night they lay in great content, and Tamael was made sure of that which he had conjectured when he first bathed himself in the waters of the river, namely that it was a strange and pleasant thing to be a man.

They still slept, Tamael's breast upon Basilea's breast, his arms about her, when morning came, and with it Porcellus and the soldiers of the Emperor Diocletian. The merchant went softly through the house and to the bed where Tamael and Basilea lay, for it was in his mind, no doubt, to surprise

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the girl and so to carry her away before she did herself a violence. No doubt also, it was in his mind to take her to the magistrates, that they might burn and torture her. But when he saw her resting there in Tamael's arms, when he saw her happy eyelids and her smiling lips, rage overcame him. He took a sword from the foremost of the soldiers and thrust it through Tamael's body and through Basilea's body. And he did this so silently, so swiftly, that they neither stirred nor sighed.

After Porcellus had withdrawn his sword, he lifted the body of Basilea and threw it into the courtyard of the inn; and the soldiers did the same with Tamael's body. Already the good man Cyriacus and the host of the inn, roused by the noise, had left their beds and run to that place, together with a considerable number of Christian neighbors. And when the people saw the merchant and the soldiers cast the two bodies down, they gave a cry. And the soldiers shouted through the window: "Hey! Good folk! Behold the fornicator and the witch! Hey! Christians! Behold your martyrs!" And Cyriacus fell upon his knees and cried in a loud voice: "Hallelujah!"

The bodies of Tamael and of Basilea lay upon the stones. They lay in shadow, for the walls were high about them and as yet the sun was low. And in this grayness they seemed to sleep. It chanced

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that they had fallen the one beside the other, and in their falling the arm of Tamael had dropped across the bosom of Basilea. So they died—as it were without awakening—their smile, their happiness, still upon their lips.

And now a quiet had come upon the courtyard. There was no sound save the murmur of Cyriacus the good man's prayers. The people were silent, staring before them. And of a sudden their eyes became great with a great amazement. They stared and stared. Little by little their gaze lifted; they looked into the shadows that the houses cast; they looked up into the brighter air; they looked yet higher into the sunshine. Then, for an instant, they remained altogether still, as though the thing that they beheld transfixed them with wonder. Then, once again, they stirred, lowered their heads, turned quickly, each man to his neighbor. "Brother," said one man, "did you see them?" "Yes," said the other. "They were beautiful as angels. Yet the man was lovelier than the woman." "Did you see, brother," said the first man, "how glad they were? How blithely they kissed and drew away and kissed again? Did you see them laugh?" "Yes," said the other. "They rose like leaves upon a joyful wind—they shone in the light like silver fish——" "And did you see," asked the first speaker, "how the man grasped the woman to him? How at the last their

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two fair bodies leaped into the clouds?" The other glanced at his companion; frowned as in astonishment. "I saw them mount," he said. "I saw them laugh and kiss and clasp each other. But you are mistaken, brother. At the last there were not two bodies. There was one body." And then he knelt, and his companion did likewise, and they said together: "Let us praise the Lord."

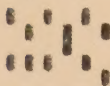


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